MEA CULPA: A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

HENRY HARLAND

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MEA CULPA

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

BY

HENRY HARLAND

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.

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To

TH. BENTZON:

IF IN THE PAGES THAT FOLLOW I HAVE FAILED TO
POINT A MORAL, MAY I AT LEAST MAKE
SURE OF ADORNING A TALE BY
BEGINNING MINE WITH
YOUR BRILLIANT
NAME?

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MEA CULPA:

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD.

PART I.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

I.

THIS narrative, which will be true in all its details, the most incidental as well as the most intimate and essential—true in letter as in spirit—reaches its catastrophe and conclusion here in London in the summer of the year 1890. But it must begin in Paris in the month of March seven years before.

We had lived in Paris, my father and I, since 1879. First, I will explain, very briefly, why we lived there; secondly, I will describe the manner of our life there.

My father, Paul Mikhaelovitch Banakin, had never associated himself, directly or indirectly, with the revolutionary movement in

Russia. He was, indeed, a man of liberal views; a Radical, even, in the sense that, despising ready-made formulas and loving realities, he went to the root of every question that he pretended to touch; a Republican, if you wish, in his political ideals; and as for religion, though he was neither an atheist nor an agnostic, he had convictions of his own which prevented him from finding the least spiritual satisfaction in the ceremonial religion of the Russian Church. In so far, then, he was perhaps of the same stuff as the active members of the revolutionary party; but in so far only. For of the aims, the methods, and the cardinal principles of the revolutionists he totally disapproved. 'The revolutionary programme,' I have often heard him say, 'has been conceived in folly, and must be executed, if at all, in crime. It is the production of brains that have been but half baked. It illustrates what a dangerous

thing a little learning is. It authors are men who have rapidly swallowed, without digesting, the most obvious and superficial deductions of modern scientific thought, but have never even caught the aroma of its more occult significance, its deeper tendencies, or its remoter corollaries. They would endeavour to force at once, by violence, changes which, in the nature of things, must come to pass slowly, by a process of growth. For me, I am too much of a philosopher, I have read my history too thoroughly, to share their theories; and with their practice how can any civilized human being feel the slightest sympathy? To Tsar-murder, terrorism, dynamite—in one word, to warfare by stealth—I pronounce myself an unrelenting foe.'

Such, roughly, was my father's attitude towards the revolutionary agitation in Russia. Yet in 1879 he had, at a moment's notice,

to fly from his country, like a thief in the night, and seek an asylum in France, lest he should be arrested and transported to Siberia as a political offender.

Why?

Because one evening, in the early spring of that year, we received a domiciliary visit from the police, at our apartment in St. Petersburg; and (my father being an omnivorous reader) there, in plain evidence, upon the table and in the shelves of our library, lay certain books, pamphlets, and periodicals which it was forbidden for Russian subjects to have in their possession, as well as certain manuscripts in which my father had set down the results of his speculations in various branches of political science, theology, and metaphysics. All this compromising literature, printed and written, the police seized; but, since they did not at once deprive my father of his liberty, he, the most optimistic

and hopeful of men, believed that the matter would end there, and made light of my anxiety lest something more serious might come of it.

In this, however, as the event proved, he was mistaken.

Suddenly, one day, a week or so later, he received a communication from a friend of his, a functionary of the highest rank, and one who would surely know whereof he spoke, warning him that his arrest and deportation to Siberia had been determined upon, and urging him to leave Russia without an hour's delay. 'I enclose passports with false names for you and Monica Paulovna,' his friend concluded....

So, with a few hundred roubles in his pocket, and such clothing as could hastily be thrown into a portmanteau, my father,—accompanied, of course, by me, his only child,—took the first train for the frontier;

and a few days later we were in the French capital.

That is why we lived in Paris.

The manner of our life there....! *Ah, Dieu de dieu, voilà une histoire!*

At first we lived in sufficient comfort at one of the hotels in the neighbourhood of the Opéra; for my father did not so much as dream that his properties would be put under the seal of the Government, and fully expected to touch his income as regularly henceforth abroad as formerly at home. But in this he was very soon undeceived. Writing to the manager of his estates to command remittances, he was informed by return of post that his revenues had been stopped by the authorities, pending his appearance in St. Petersburg to answer the charges of political untrustworthiness there lying against him.

After that, the question of ways and

means became for us of the most pressing nature.

The little ready money that he had taken with him upon our flight had rapidly dwindled, until now less than a thousand francs remained; and where more was to come from was a dubious and appalling problem. My father, a Russian noble of the old style, was the incarnation of the unpractical: intensely proud, sensitive to the point of effeminacy, accustomed to every luxury, and as irresponsible as a child in the handling of money; a man who had never earned, nor thought of earning, a kopeck, yet who had never hesitated to throw away a hundred roubles; a man, in fact, who had done nothing all his life but dream, read, talk, and spend; than whom there could be no one more amiable, more polished, or more inefficient. He was gifted with a fine intellect, and in the face of an abstract theory

of any kind was all enlightenment and penetration; but the smallest concrete difficulty left him as dismayed and as helpless as a baby. How was such a man to provide food, clothing, and a home for himself and his eighteen-year-old daughter? . . . This was an enigma over which my father pondered much, about which he discoursed much, but in relation to which he did—nothing, except wring his hands and weep.

Gradually I came to realize that the duties of breadwinner must necessarily devolve upon me.

What could I do?

I was a good pianist. I could teach music, if I could find pupils.

I had had an English—or, rather, an American—governess from the time I was five till I was fifteen years old; therefore I could also teach English, or I could translate.

I had finally a little talent for drawing and

painting, which might possibly be turned to some practical account.

That was what I felt I could do. But there was another question for me to face, almost equally grave: What would my father allow me to do? I knew that he would object passionately to my doing any work at all for pay. I knew that, upon my broaching the subject, he would cry out, 'I would rather starve!'... I knew, in one word, that we should have a struggle.

To cut a long story short, we had a struggle that lasted several days; for two of those days my father would not speak to me, thinking in that way to make me feel his displeasure and to break my will; but in the end my obstinacy proved to be of sterner stuff than his, and I gained my point. At least, he said: 'Do as you please, do as you please.'

Then I began to work.

I gave lessons in music and in English to the pupils whom I was able to procure; I translated sensation novels, English and American, into French, receiving four hundred francs for each volume from a publisher in the Palais Royal; and I coloured photographs for a photographer in the Rue de Rivoli. (Since my marriage, I may say in passing, that publisher has caused to be printed upon the title-pages of the novels I anonymously translated for him, '*Traduit de l'anglais par Madame la Princesse Léonticheff:*' whether to the greater annoyance of Prince Léonticheff or myself it would be difficult to tell.) Thus I contrived to gain a livelihood for my father and myself; but, believe me, it was a most meagre, shabby, and precarious livelihood. For my own part, however, I must own that I was not altogether unhappy. It was my youth, no doubt, which enabled me to adapt myself to our changed conditions without too

much discomfort. Besides, I was thoroughly occupied; I had no time, no strength, for discontent. Indeed, had it not been for the constant sense of care and responsibility that I carried with me, I should have had little to complain of. But my poor father! For him, as he often said, it was scarcely less than purgatory. Deprived of all that ease and largeness of existence to which from his cradle he had been habituated, he suffered keenly also from the humiliation of finding himself dependent for his daily bread upon the exertions of his daughter. His only solace lay in devising schemes by which to re-establish the family fortune.... oh, but schemes! At last he put one of them in operation. After the assassination of the Emperor he began to write a history of Russia, from the earliest times to the present day. Once completed, he was sure, the publishers would vie with each other to purchase

his manuscript. At all events, it kept him busy, and so perhaps rendered him less conscious of the privations of his life than he would otherwise have been.

In the matter of lodgings we had gone steadily from bad to worse, until now, in 1883, we had two communicating rooms up four flights of winding stairs in the Hôtel du St. Esprit, a dingy *maison garnie*, inhabited chiefly by students, in the Rue St. Jacques; certainly, in view of my sex, not the most desirable quarter of Paris, but, considering our requirements, the cheapest. Our morning coffee and our mid-day breakfast I prepared over a spirit-stove; for our dinner we went to a restaurant in the Boulevard St. Michel, where a table d'hôte—of a merit by no means extraordinary, it is true—was to be had for one franc twenty-five. For the society of congenial human beings, I confess, we pined. The French students by whom

we were surrounded we had no reason to love. Almost our only friend was the composer Armidis, half Greek, half English, an inspired musician, an exquisite poet, and the handsomest, the shabbiest, the most improbable, whimsical, and entertaining man I have ever known. He dwelt on the other side of the Seine, but he came frequently to see us, and would often meet us at the ordinary where we dined. The worst dinner, with Armidis at the table, was always a merry and delightful affair. He was in receipt of an excellent income, and had no one but himself to spend it on; yet one of his eccentricities forbade his ever buying a suit of clothes. He always wore the cast-off garments of his friends! The effect was generally fearful and wonderful. Seeing him from behind, you would have thought, 'A beggar.' But the moment you beheld his face, with his snow-white hair and beard, his

fresh complexion, his fine, proud features, his large eyes, full of colour, daring, and intelligence, you would have corrected yourself: 'No; a man of genius and distinction, a poet, an artist, a prince among artists, in masquerade.'

We were, it must be admitted, Bohemians; but Bohemians from necessity, not from choice. Even I, resigned as I was to our circumstances, would have been surprised if anybody had told me that I was happy. Yet now I know that those were almost the happiest days of my life.

II.

My father's duties as the historian of Russia required him to go a good deal to the public libraries, for the purpose of consulting authorities. He would frequently leave the Hôtel du St. Esprit directly after his morning coffee, and not return till towards the hour for dinner. On these occasions he would take his second breakfast at some cheap restaurant in the quarter where he was at work.

One evening in the early part of March, 1883, when he came home from a day spent abroad like this, I saw, the instant he entered our rooms, that something had happened to

disturb his tranquillity. He was manifestly in a state of great nervous excitement, which he was doing his utmost to conceal, but which anybody with the smallest faculty for observation could not have failed to discover at a single glance: excitement, moreover, which was plainly of a sorrowful, not of a joyful nature. A spot of scarlet burned in either cheek. He kept his eyes persistently averted from mine; but now and then I caught a glimpse of them, in spite of him, and then I saw that they were red and swollen, as if he had been weeping. At dinner, though he tried hard to eat, it was evident that he had no appetite; his hands shook, that held his knife and fork; when he spoke, which he did but seldom and briefly, though he was ordinarily a voluble talker, his voice trembled, and it had a peculiar strained ring. After dinner he sat for two hours or more motionless before our fire-

place, glaring at the coals, once in awhile breathing a prodigious sigh, but never uttering a syllable. I was puzzled and frightened, yet something withheld me from questioning him. I felt that it would be better to wait until in his own time he should volunteer an explanation: which I did not doubt that he would sooner or later do, for he was a man who craved sympathy in all his emotions, sad or glad, as irresistibly as his body craved food, drink, or sleep.... At last, however, still without a word, he rose, put on his overcoat, and took his hat and stick.

At that I could hold in no longer.

'You are going out?' I inquired.

'You see it, do you not?' he answered a little petulantly.

'Where are you going?'

'Where? What is that to you? Must I account to you for all my movements?'

'Certainly not. Only, I should like to

know; and I had no reason to suppose that you would object to telling me—that is all.'

'Well, I am going nowhere—anywhere—to walk.'

'It is late. It is past eleven. You had better go to bed.'

'Bed!' he cried, in his strained, unnatural voice. 'And what for, pray?'

'To sleep, of course,' said I.

My father could never bring himself to realize that I was a grown-up woman; he invariably treated me, and doubtless thought of me, as a little silly girl in pinafores. . . .

'My child,' he now replied, with an accent of profound solemnity, 'I shall never be able to sleep again. You, who are young—you, who do not know what care and responsibility mean—you may sleep. For me, I have that upon my mind which renders the very name of sleep preposterous.'

Also, at his moments of emotional dis-

turbance, he was prone to don, in approaching me, an armour of magniloquence, to become oracular and rhetorical, if not even a little theatrical.

'You had better tell me what it is,' I urged. 'You had better share your trouble with me. Two pairs of shoulders can bear it more easily than one.'

He looked at me very hard for an instant; his eyes began to blink, his lips to pucker; he burst into tears.

'What is it? What is it, father?' I entreated.

He shrugged his shoulders, and, with a despairing gesture, cried out, 'I am a ruined man, a ruined man! When you stopped me, do you know what I was going to do?' he asked. 'I was going out to put an end to my existence. Within a few minutes I should have been lying dead at the bottom of the Seine. To-morrow you would have

found my lifeless corpse upon the marbles of the Morgue.'

He sank into his old seat before the fire, and passively allowed me to take his hat and stick. For some minutes he wept silently, without speaking. I knelt at his side, and held his hand, and waited.

By-and-by, always with a certain magniloquence, and employing the tone that one would naturally use in explaining the affairs of an adult to a little child — addressing me, that is to say, *de haut en bas*—he proceeded to make the following confession, in his studied, old-fashioned French :

'I am, as I have already told you, a ruined man. The story is of the shortest, the simplest, the most tragical. Young as you are, I believe that you had better hear it, so that you may understand the fatal combination of circumstances that drive your father to a premature and ignominious grave. . . .'

His voice died out, and for a breathing-space he was silent. Then he went on:

'Figure to yourself that to-day, at noon, as I was leaving the Bibliothèque Nationale, to go to breakfast at a neighbouring table-d'hôte, I had no sooner set my foot in the street than I ran almost into the arms of ... whom do you think? My old friend Sagoskin, Serge Petrovitch Sagoskin, the author of "Russ and Finn," whom I had not seen for a matter of five years. He greeted me with the utmost effusiveness, inquired cordially about you, and insisted upon my accompanying him to his hotel, to meet the distinguished novelists Z—— and X——, whom he had invited to breakfast. I assented with pleasure; and we had a most delightful meal, diversified by conversation as edifying as it was entertaining, and in which, you will be glad to learn, your father did not shine only as a listener.'

'Yes? yes?' I prompted, as he paused again.

'Well, my child, as we were taking our coffee, Sagoskin proposed a little turn at *Zinkalinka*—a proposition which was generally received with acclamation, and to which I, for one, agreed the more readily, because, invariably enjoying good fortune at cards, I was confident that I should lose nothing, and hopeful, my dear, of winning enough to constitute an acceptable addition to our fund of ready money—though, indeed, the game being undertaken for amusement purely and simply, was projected upon so small a scale that no one could win enough to talk about. But see how things turn out! From the beginning I lost; and contrary to every reasonable probability, I lost constantly to the end. It was a complete *déveine*. Reluctant to show the white feather to my antagonists, and animated by

the conviction that the luck must infallibly change, as well as by the desire to retrieve my losses, if not to come away a gainer, I continued to play until I found that I owed the bank, which was held by Sagoskin himself, a matter of five hundred francs. Then, in despair, I pleaded an appointment with you, and took my leave. I explained to my host that I did not happen to have five hundred francs upon my person, and gave him my note-of-hand for the amount, promising to redeem it to-morrow morning.... Such, in fine, is the dilemma in which I find myself placed. Inspired by the ambition, not ignoble, to contribute what I might to the expenses of my family, and having every reason to believe that Providence had put in my way an opportunity for doing so, I am, by an entirely unprecedented and anomalous run of ill-luck, reduced to this desperate alternative: either I must pay

Sagoskin five hundred francs to-morrow, or I must avoid dishonour by taking my life.'

He drew a long breath and flourished his hand, to indicate that his narrative was finished. Clearly he did not reproach himself; it was not for me to reproach him.

Presently he added, in the tone of a man moralizing upon a perfectly impersonal event: 'It is one of those incomprehensible examples of the apparently blind and wanton brutality of Fate, which force certain thinkers to accept the atheistic and pessimistic hypothesis of life, that you should lose a father, that Russia should lose an historian, and that I should be cut off in the very prime of my career, all for a paltry consideration of five hundred francs!'

In a moment he demanded, 'How much money have you in hand?'

'Less than two hundred francs,' I answered; 'and we shall need every penny

of that to pay our way to the end of the month.'

'Have we any property that . . . that you could exchange for money at the Mont de Piété ?'

'Alas, my father, I have already pledged everything that we had of value in the world. Our jewellery is all gone. Only our clothing is left; and you know as well as I do how much, or rather how little, that is worth.'

'But your furs ?'

'Sold as long ago as November.'

'*Eh bien*, it is then as I supposed. I must die.'

I paid little heed to his talk of suicide, for I knew that it was but a figure of speech. 'If you should go to Serge Petrovitch,' I ventured, 'and frankly explain to him your circumstances, and ask to be forgiven a debt which is, after all, only a card debt, and not one contracted for an equivalent ?'

'*Seigneur Dieu!*' he exclaimed. 'Is my daughter, then, devoid of the least sentiment of pride, of honour?... Monica, I would rather die a hundred deaths!'

'Well, then...?' I questioned.

'It comes to this: we must borrow.'

'Whom can we borrow from?'

'Reflect a moment. You will see that there is but one person in Paris to whom we can apply for a loan.'

'Who is that? I cannot think of any one.'

'Why, Armidis, of course.'

'Oh!' I cried.

'Yes; we must borrow five hundred francs from Armidis. He will gladly lend them, I am sure. He is all good-nature.'

'But how are we ever to repay him?'

My father shrugged his shoulders.

'Oh, we must somehow achieve the impossible. Or perhaps something will turn up.

But that is a question for the future. For the present our dilemma stands thus: we must borrow five hundred francs from Armidis, or I must take my life.'

'Very good,' I acquiesced, though with a heart by no means light. 'Then you must go to Armidis in the morning and borrow the money.'

'*I?*' my father almost screamed, starting half-way to his feet. '*I* go to him?... Are you mad? Or is it that you have not the faintest comprehension of my character? Rather than ask Armidis to lend me a sou I would cut out my tongue!'

'But then...?' I faltered.

'No; it is you, my child, you who are young, and who do not feel these things as I feel them—it is you who must go to Armidis. Go to him in the morning, *raconte lui quelque histoire*, and bring the money home to me.... Do not

refuse,' he implored passionately. 'I exact it by right of my position as your parent,' he added with an accent of authority.

'If I go to Armidis for you,' I returned, 'I cannot tell him a story. I must tell him the truth.'

'In other words, you will sacrifice your father's honour!' he cried wildly.

'I can't see how your honour will be involved. You have done nothing dishonourable,' said I.

'You are right,' he agreed, his excitement suddenly subsiding. 'Armidis, though not a man of the world, has sense and reason. He will understand.... Then you will go?'

'Yes, I will go.'

'Ah-h-h!' sighed my father, a long sigh of relief.

His relief presently intensified into a

complete reaction of spirits. He opened a bottle of wine, and demanded something to eat.

'We will sup, *ma fille*. We will forget our late annoyances in a little feast. . . . Oh, you are a good girl'—he took my chin in his hands and smiled into my eyes—'yes, a very good little girl. I cannot complain of you. You are, as the English say, a chip of the old block.'

He was very merry and good-natured for the rest of the night.

'If I had played a little longer,' he declared, 'the luck would certainly have changed. It was bound to do so by the immutable law of chances. Yes, I conclude that I was foolish to withdraw from the game. If I had persevered I might have brought you home . . . who knows how many hundreds, how many thousands, of francs ?'

After I had kissed him good-night, and

had reached the threshold of his room, on the way to my own, he called me back; and holding his candle above his head, so that it cleared my face and left his own in shadow, 'If—if you should ask Armidis for a thousand, instead of five hundred?' he suggested.

I was perplexed. 'But why? What for?' I queried.

'Why, then I could resume the game to-morrow, and take my revenge.'

'Oh!'

'Well?'

'Oh, no, I cannot. It is out of the question.'

'But be reasonable. It is the quickest way of repaying him. I should expect to win twice, three times, as much. By the law of chances I can prove to you that the probabilities are as one million to one against my losing.'

'No, no, no,' I insisted.

He gave a gesture of impatience. Then he paused, and seemed to meditate for a moment. In the end, 'I will speak to you again in the morning,' he said. 'Good-night.'

III.

He was as good as his word; and in the morning, surely enough, he renewed his efforts to persuade me to ask Armidis for double the amount of his indebtedness to Sagoskin. He began by commanding me to do so, by virtue of his position as my father. Failing in that, he sought by argument to convince me that it would be wise and right. Finally, he addressed his appeal to my love for him, not to deny him what he so earnestly desired. But I was firm in my refusal.

'Very well,' he said at last. 'I must submit to your feminine unreasonableness

and obstinacy. I must suffer, though I should be hypocritical if I pretended to forgive, your unfilial disobedience. Go, then, at once, and fetch the money. I will wait for you here. You ought not to be gone longer than a couple of hours at the furthest. . . . Go. Why do you delay ?'

'My dearest father,' I returned, speaking as gently as I could, yet fearing that my words would provoke a storm, 'I implore you not to be angry with me ; but it is impossible . . . let me explain . . . it is impossible for me to go at once. This, as you know, is my busiest day in all the week. I have lessons continuously till three o'clock. If I disappoint my pupils, I not only lose the price of their lessons—which we could ill afford at any time—but I run the risk of being dismissed from their employment. That would be to fly in the face of Providence, especially in view of our present

difficulty. I cannot reach Armidis's house before this afternoon.'

'In that case,' said he, with an effect of the calmness of despair, 'you need not go at all. Debts of this nature must be liquidated within twenty-four hours, or the debtor is for ever dishonoured. I must hand the money to Sagoskin before five o'clock this evening, or I must die. Since you deem your lessons to be of superior importance to your father's honour, even to his life, go to them. That is my last word,... except adieu.'

'*Au revoir, mon cher petit père*,' I said, kissing him on the forehead, and stroking his fleecy thin white hair. 'I will have the money here by half-past four at the latest. It will not take you more than half an hour to go to Sagoskin's hotel, so that before five o'clock you and he will be quits. *Au revoir*.'

'*Au revoir, ma fille*,' he responded, relapsing suddenly into his simple, cheerful self. 'I shall spend the day quietly at home, arranging the notes I took at the library yesterday morning.'

I had never been at Armidis's lodgings, but I knew that he lived at No. 239, Avenue de la Grande Armée, away out beyond the Arc de l'Étoile, near the Porte Maillot. It was a quarter-past three when I inquired for him of the concierge.

'Yes, madame; Monsieur Armidis is at home,' the concierge informed me. 'At the bottom of the court, staircase A, fourth story, at the left.'

I crossed a damp and dirty courtyard, which reeked dreadfully of the stables by which it was surrounded, and in which a stableman, who treated me to an inquisitive stare, was busy washing a carriage; passed

through a narrow, dirty doorway, distinguished by a huge A in red paint; climbed four flights of dark back stairs, that smelled forcibly of cooking, whereof onions and cabbages seemed to furnish the basis; and pulled the bell-cord at the left-hand side of the last landing.

My heart was beating strenuously. I felt that I had come upon a very delicate and painful errand, and I prayed mentally for strength and courage to perform it. Though my poor dear father chose not to acknowledge it, I believe that I was naturally as proud and as sensitive as himself, and that I shrank as fearfully as he could have done from the humiliation of asking Armidis to lend me money. I tried to think how I had better word my request; and the possibility of a refusal, of a rebuff, was constantly present to my imagination. It was also entirely possible that he might not have five

hundred francs to lend, in which case . . . ! Several minutes passed, and the bell had not been answered. I rang again. What if he should be absent, after all? The concierge might easily have made a mistake. Again I waited several minutes, and still the door remained closed in my face. A good deal disheartened, I rang for a third time.

At last came the sound of footsteps from within. Then, from behind the door, Armidis's lusty voice, with an accent of plaintive remonstrance, called out in French, 'Yes, yes. I hear. I'm awake. No need to ring a thousand times! I'm not, upon my word, I'm not the Sleeping Beauty. Now go away, and in ten minutes you may bring me my coffee.'

'Mr. Armidis,' I said in English, 'it is I —Monica Banakin.'

'Oh! You don't say so! Is it really? Why, how do you do? I thought it was

the concierge come to wake me up. And I was vexed with him for ringing so many times. As if I were deaf! It seemed so unfeeling of him. Oh, they're a bad lot, *ces concierges*. Outrageous!... You—you don't mind, do you? Say that you don't mind.'

'Mind! Mind what?'

'Why, my having thought it was the concierge. I never would have thought it if I had known that it was you. But, you see, I really couldn't know, could I? I was expecting him. I'm so sorry. I hope you don't feel hurt about it.'

'Oh no, not in the least,' I assured him, laughing.

'So good of you. I was sure you wouldn't. You've got such a kind heart under your forbidding exterior. You couldn't nurse resentment when no offence was intended. But I thank you very much, all the same. And it's really Monica Banakin—really?

You're not trying to deceive me? Of course, I'm helplessly at your mercy, not being able to see through the door.'

'It's really I,' I said.

'Well, then, do you know, you've had an inspiration. The arrival of a kindred spirit is just what I've been longing for. Only I didn't dare to *hope* for it; and now it seems too good to be true. There! I don't believe it is you, after all.'

'Who do you think it is, then?'

'Ah, now I'm sure. Yes; it's your voice, your own liquid accents. Oh, it's too delightful! Do you know, I was going over to your shop this evening, just on purpose to see you. I was really.'

'I hope you won't let that good resolution be shaken by my coming here.'

'Oh, how nice of you! Very flattering! *Bocca, bocca bella!* But I don't know. You see, it's this way. I was up all night com-

posing a little melody, writing a little verse; and I wanted to try its effect on you. You'll give me your honest opinion, won't you? You must bind yourself to that beforehand. Let no false kindness temper your expression. It's the best thing, by all means the best thing, I've ever done: a masterpiece, *in parvo*, destined to live till the trump of doom. That's what I think to-day, mind. That's what one always thinks when one's latest production is still warm. To-morrow it will be cold. Then I shall probably recognise it as just one failure more. Agony! You shall anticipate my to-morrow's judgment for me, eh?'

'Are you going to perform it at me from behind closed doors?' I asked.

'Oh, now, how unkind you are!' he grieved. 'So heartless! How can I open the door? I—I've just got out of bed. I'm not presentable. It wouldn't be proper. It

would compromise me so. Oh dear, what shall I do?'

In the face of a practical emergency, Armidis always assumed the helplessness of a big child: partly, I think, for the sake of the drollery of it, but partly because he really was, when it came to practical matters, simply a great, big, overgrown baby.

'You might go and dress,' I suggested. 'I'll wait here on the landing.'

'Oh, will you really? Oh, how good you are! So much obliged! Forgive what I said about your being heartless; it was said in the stress of passion; I never meant it. I'll not keep you five minutes. *Seulement le temps d'endosser une robe de chambre.* Shall—shall I throw you out something to read? You could turn your back, you know, and I could lay it out on the floor.'

'No, thanks. I don't want anything to read. Now go.'

Presently the door was opened, and Armidis stood before me, all smiles, and held out both of his fat dimpled hands in welcome — hands just like a baby's, only bigger. From throat to foot his tall and robust figure was wrapped in a flannel dressing-gown, of a soiled and faded, but still sufficiently flamboyant, scarlet.

'Come!' he cried. 'Come in. *Soyez la bienvenue.* I see you're admiring my costume. I look like a cardinal in it, don't I? It was given me by Marvellac, the painter. I always put it on when I compose sacred music. Not that I've been composing sacred music to-day, though; *tutt' altro;* very profane. But I thought you'd enjoy the colour, and take it as a compliment. Come—this way—in here.'

He showed no curiosity to learn the occasion of my visit, but seemed to accept it as a thing quite in the natural course of events.

'*Ecco!* This is my laboratory. It is here that the immortal works are executed.'

He preceded me into the untidiest, the most disorderly little room I had ever entered in my life. A vast table occupied the middle of the floor, covered with a wild litter of books, manuscripts, ink-bottles, pens, tobacco-pipes, soiled cups and dishes, crusts of bread, gloves, neck-ties... in a word, all manner of related and unrelated odds and ends. The rest of the room was nearly filled up by a grand piano, over the top of which, as well as over the seats of the chairs and every available inch of the floor, were scattered loose sheets of music, pell-mell, as if by the wind. The frame of the looking-glass above the mantel was stuck all round with gaudily-coloured cards, which proved upon inspection to be advertisements of the Bon Marché, the Petit St. Thomas, *Vin de Bugeaud*, and various patent medicines.

I inferred from its appearance that the room had not been swept or dusted for months and months.

He led me straight to the keyboard of his piano.

'Sit down—is the chair high enough?—shall I put a book?—and play it over once, to familiarize yourself,' he said, laying some manuscript-music upon the support. 'Then I'll sing it to your accompaniment.'

His manuscript was rather blind—indeed, it looked at a rough glance simply like paper spattered over at random with small dots of violet ink—and I blundered a good deal in getting through it; whilst he stood at the other end of the piano, beating time, shouting out little words of guidance—'Softly,' 'Faster,' 'Not so fast,' '*Allons donc, plus de feu!*'—clapping his hands now and then to encourage me, and when I committed a particularly brutal error, groaning and

writhing in an agony which, though facetiously exaggerated, probably had a core of reality.

When I had stumbled to the end of it, 'Oh, murderess! assassin!' he cried. 'To mangle the poor child of my imagination under my very beard like that! But, now then! Now, once more! *Da capo.* Smoothly, easily; kindly, discreetly; with confidence, with spirit! Bramble-bush! You have scratched out my eyes! Now, scratch them in again!'

I began, as he bade me, *da capo;* and on this second trial naturally I did better. He walked up and down the room, nodding his head, waving his hand—in fact, marking time with his whole body—and keeping his eyes shut, while an expression of beatitude shone upon his face.

'*Brava! Bravissima!* I forgive you everything. You did it nobly. You have

atoned.... Well,' he declared, 'it's not so good as I hoped, nor so bad as I feared. You—you don't think it's altogether bad, do you?' he demanded eagerly, becoming motionless, and scanning my face as if his life hung upon my answer.

'On the contrary, I like it very much. I think it's charming,' I assured him.

'Charming! Did you say charming? Oh, how perfunctory, how banale! Charming, quotha. How undiscriminating! Oh, that is the most unkindest cut of all! I never would have thought you capable of calling it charming. What injury have I ever done to you to be snubbed like that? You cruel thing!'

'I'm sorry if the word offends you. I think it is delightful—full of colour, passion, imagination. And the harmonies are delicious, and very novel.'

'Ah, that is better. Now you see it.

The harmonies! Of course! But wait, wait. I will sing it to you. It's meant for a woman, but I'll attempt it all the same. *Tout artiste est un peu femme.* Now! Are you ready! One, two, three; one, two, three! Excellent!'

He sang it to my accompaniment in his wonderful sweet baritone, joining to the technique of a capital executant the fervour and the intelligence of the creative artist.

'And now, Sybil, wise woman, speak. Pronounce its fate.'

He appeared to be delighted with the admiration that I expressed, dancing around the room, and insisting, 'Really? Really? You're not saying it to please me? You really mean it?' And when I had satisfied him of my sincerity, 'Very good! You shall take the consequences of your words. I shall dedicate it to you,' he announced. 'Dedicated to Monica Paulovna Banakin

by her ardent though aged admirer, the Perpetrator! Won't that be fine? Romantic, eh?... *Enfin*, it is settled. I throw it off my mind. And now you may tell me, if you wish, to what I am indebted for the unprecedented honour of this visit. I do not attribute it to pure benevolence; the desire to afford me the pleasure of your society. Nothing wrong, I hope, with the Lily of the Field?'

That was his nick-name for my father, who was very punctilious about his dress, who was even, to be frank, a good deal of a dandy; and of whom Armidis—who could never deny himself an opportunity to say a sharp thing, or to do a kind one—had remarked, 'He toils not, neither does he spin; yet I'll bet a shilling that Solomon in all his glory couldn't have held a candle to him.'

I summoned my courage, told him the

story of my father's encounter with Sagoskin, and asked him to lend me five hundred francs.

To my surprise, he took it as a great joke, laughing immoderately, and crying, 'Oh, how sweet! How ecstatic! Oh, that Paul Mikhaelovitch! Wasn't it just like him? You know, he solemnly thought he was doing a shrewd, a prudent, even a noble thing. I'll wager he thinks so still. Ah, you Russians are absolutely the most exquisite creations on the face of the earth. Children! Why, for pure juvenility you beat even the Italians. Oh, I wouldn't have missed this for anything in the world. Thanks so very much. Here... here is the money.'

From the clutter upon his table he fished out a tin box that had once held Egyptian cigarettes; and from the interior of that he took five one hundred franc notes, and handed them to me.

I began to stammer out some words of thanks, but he cut me short.

'Come, come; time is precious, and I want to show you my smelting works,' he cried. 'See! Here is a crucible, the common or garden sort that you can buy of any chemist for considerably less than a song. Here is a spirit-stove. Here is a sheet of tinfoil. Now observe. Watch.'

He lighted the wick of the spirit-stove, and placed the crucible, with the tinfoil in it, upon the support. In a minute the tinfoil was melted. Then he poured the liquid metal out into a goblet of water that stood near by, and exhorted me to notice the beautiful and grotesque shapes that it took in hardening.

'Isn't it adorable? Isn't it fairy-like?' he pleaded. 'Have you ever seen anything so lovely? I pick up and treasure all the bits of tinfoil I can lay my hands on, for the pure

joy of doing this. Of course a Philistine wouldn't appreciate it. But you—I'm sure you do; don't you?'

'And yet you call my father a child!' I laughed.

'Oh, don't, don't,' he groaned. 'Don't say you think it childish. That would be more than I could bear. Another illusion shattered! Let me retain my respect for you, my faith in you. I have felt drawn towards you, I have felt an affinity for you; I have taken you to be a pure idealist, strictly inconsequential, like myself. Don't be logical, don't demand a reason for things; I couldn't bear it, really. Understand that if I had a reason for it, I wouldn't do it; the joy would be poisoned, the zest destroyed.... But there! You belie yourself. You were dissembling. You were only making believe. Your secret heart thrills with the rapture of it as keenly as mine does. *Enfin*, I will see

you this evening at the Concombre Rose. Good-bye.'

The Concombre Rose was the restaurant in the Boulevard St. Michel, where we dined.

I found that it was past four o'clock when I left Armidis. To be punctual at home, therefore, and to spare my father the anxiety of waiting for me, I committed the extravagance of a cab.

'Ah, it is you,' he said, looking up from his writing-table, as I entered the room. 'Well, do not interrupt me now. I am in the middle of a paragraph. I will speak with you presently.'

'But you wanted to put the money into Serge Petrovitch's hands before five o'clock. You will have barely time to do so, if you start at once.'

'Hush, hush; you disturb my train of

thought. An hour later, more or less, will not matter.'

Armidis kept his promise to meet us at the Concombre Rose — which was rather surprising, for he could never be counted upon to remember a promise of that nature— and my father, who had seen Sagoskin, and paid his debt, was in such high spirits that he insisted upon ordering a bottle of champagne, in which to pledge the friend who, he said, had come to the rescue of his honour. Afterwards, he invited us to go with him to the Odéon, where they were playing *La Vie de Bohème*. But Armidis was considerate enough to decline; so, instead, we went to our rooms, and spent the evening over the piano.

After our guest had left us, when we were on the point of separating for the night, 'Ah, Monica,' sighed my father, 'if you had only

asked him for a thousand! You see, he thought nothing of it. He is so good-natured. It is as well to get in debt for a sheep as for a lamb. And with that capital to start with, who knows what I might have won? Sagoskin offered to give me my revenge to-morrow. He even offered on the spot to throw the dice, and make it double or quits. He could not conceal his astonishment when I declined. I would rather die than let him suspect that my true reason was poverty You see, you have made a mistake. After this, let me trust, you will be guided by one who is older and wiser than yourself.... Kiss me good-night.'

IV.

And now, of course, the question that I had to face was this: How am I to pay our debt to Armidis? By what means shall I be able to save five hundred francs?

Not an easy question to answer, because, in the first place, our actual living expenses swallowed up every penny that I could earn, and, in the second, we were already living as economically as it seemed possible for two people to do who desired at least a show of decency, if not of comfort. I knew that Armidis would not be an importunate creditor, that indeed he would be the most lenient; I was sure that he would give me

plenty of time, that he would let me pay him little by little, in instalments: but all the same, the fact remained that we owed him five hundred francs, and that somehow, some time, our scores must be cleared. It came to this: either I must contrive to increase my earnings, or to diminish our expenses, or I must do both. How to increase my earnings I could not think. In what way, then, could we lessen our expenses?

The first item in which it appeared to me that a reduction would be feasible was that of rent. As I have said, we had two communicating rooms on the fourth story. For the larger of the two, which my father used as a bedroom and study, and which we used in common as a sitting-room, we paid fifty francs a month. For the smaller of the two, my bedroom, we paid thirty-five. It occurred to me that I might be able to arrange with Madame Pamparagoux, our landlady, to let

her give me a smaller room still, perhaps up another flight of stairs, for a lower price. Madame Pamparagoux was a warm-hearted Méridionale, a brave and honest woman. She said at once that she could let me have a little room on the top story, looking into the court, for twenty francs a month. Thus a monthly saving of fifteen francs could be effected at a single stroke—not a very big saving, certainly, but decidedly better than nothing. Then I could give up the piano, which—feeling that if I aspired to gain our livelihood as a teacher of music, I must devote what time I could to practising, and so keep myself efficient—I had hired for ten francs a month. Finally, perhaps I could spare from two to three francs weekly by walking to and from my lessons, instead of taking the omnibus. But altogether I could see no prospect of my being able to put aside more than thirty or thirty-five francs a month ;

and at that rate, it would take me about a year and a half to get quits with our friend. . . .

In truth, it was a dear experience, that little turn at *Zinkalinka*, whereby my father had hoped to contribute something to the support of his family.

I say that I despaired of managing to increase my earnings; and this was because already every hour of my day was occupied, and I had not a moment of leisure in which to undertake additional work. You see, besides what I did for remuneration, I had many duties of a domestic nature to perform. For example, I had to mend my father's clothes, and to make as well as mend my own. I had to brew the coffee in the morning, to go to market, to cook our mid-day breakfast, to wash the dishes, etc., etc. On the whole, I was as busy as, with the natural limitations of time and of human endurance, I could well be.

When, however, I told my father of my determination to change my room, and to give up my piano, he protested that he would not hear of it.

'As for your piano, it is your tool, it is the implement of your profession,' he urged, not without reason. 'It is senseless, your intention of doing without it. You would kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. And as for your plan of moving upstairs — my child, you do not consider the proprieties. Aside from the fact that I cannot consent to let you make yourself so uncomfortable—by sleeping, *parbleu*, in a room that is no bigger than a closet, and which is as black as night even at high noon, looking as it does into that narrow court — aside from all that, you must remember that you are a young girl, and that it would be unseemly to the last degree for you to go so far away from me, your father and natural protector, especially in an *hôtel*

meublé like this. No, we must not be separated, above all at night. As for your indebtedness to Armidis—it is a matter for the future.'

'Yes. But I must prepare for the future in the present.'

'Oh, piff! You know perfectly well that he will not press you; on the contrary, he will give you all the time that you can possibly desire. What is it? Five hundred francs? The merest bagatelle. It is a matter for the future. As you are aware, I refuse to regard our present straitened circumstances as other than purely temporary, arising from an absurd misunderstanding on the part of the authorities in Russia. I am in correspondence with various influential friends of mine there, to the end of causing a statement of my case to be laid before the Emperor in person. Of course there are inevitable delays, legal formalities, bureau-

cratic obstructions, and so forth and so forth; but eventually these will be terminated, my affair will arrive, and I shall be reinstated in the possession of my properties, if not in all my rights and privileges as a loyal member of the Nobility. Then I will enable you to return this trifling sum to Armidis with interest, if you please, at the rate of *cent. per cent.*'

'It is not interest that Armidis wants, my father; and for the rest, here are four years already that you have been hoping from day to day to see justice done you by the Emperor. It may easily be four years more before your hopes are realized. We must not keep Armidis waiting for four years.'

'Well, then, think of this. I hold a ticket of the value of twenty francs in the Royal Italian Lottery. The drawing takes place in a fortnight. I may be a winner to the amount of a million francs.'

'Yes, but by your law of chances, what is the likelihood that you will?'

'Ah, it is impossible to reason with you. At all events, I hope you recognise that this difficulty is one of your own creation. If you had obeyed your father, and asked Armidis for a thousand, instead of that beggarly five hundred, we should to-day be quits with him, and have a comfortable sum in hand besides.'

'What is the use of going back to that?'

'To impress the ill consequences of your disobedience upon your mind, my child. But now enough. I will tell you what I will do. Rather than allow you to carry out the quixotic plans that you have in mind, I will humiliate myself so far as to write to my cousin Ogareff, at Moscow, and ask him to lend me the money.'

'Borrow from Peter to pay Paul! *A quoi bon?* It is simpler for me to move upstairs.

I assure you I shall not mind the change. The room up there is quite as good as the one I have down here, only it is a little smaller. And although it looks upon the court, it is so high up that it gets plenty of light. Besides, I shall never be in it, except to sleep. All the rest of the time, when I am at home, I am here in this room with you.'

My father took my chin between his hands, and looked me curiously in the face.

'Where do you get your obstinacy, I should like to know,' he said. 'Not from me, that is very certain. I can be firm, firm as a rock; but I cannot be obstinate. When I discover in your face the expression that is there at this moment, I recognise that to reason with you will be futile. Very well, then, I submit—only, with this reservation. It shall not be you who will move upstairs; I will do so. You will move in here; I will

move up there: and thus the affair will arrange itself to our mutual satisfaction.'

But there was one insurmountable objection to this plan: namely, my father had a predisposition to bronchial trouble; and the doctor had told him that he must always sleep in a room that had the sun during the day; and the little room upstairs, looking towards the north, had no sun; whilst the room downstairs, looking towards the south, had the sun almost from the time it rose until it set. This objection I at last persuaded my father to admit, and to give way before.

Accordingly, on the first of the next month, I took possession of my new quarters; and on the same day the men came to remove our piano—which, I confess, I could not see them do without a sinking of the heart.

A few evenings later Armidis called upon

us. I happened at the moment of his arrival to be alone. My father had stepped out to buy some cigarettes.

Looking into my eyes with a smile that was at once quizzical and reproachful, wagging his great white head at me, and shaking his finger, our visitor began to drawl, in his most plaintive accents, 'Oh, you wicked creature! I've found you out. So fair, so guileless-seeming, yet already a past mistress in iniquity! Oh, you whitened sepulchre, you generation of vipers!'

'Why, what have I done?' I asked.

'All night long,' he went on solemnly, without noticing my question, 'I lay awake thinking of your dreadful wickedness. It's been a shocking blow to me. One more illusion shattered. One more idol cast from its base. Oh, you heartless thing! You fair-spoken villain! You premature mass of sophistication!'

'But, really, what have I done?' I repeated.

'Oh, don't, don't,' he expostulated, grievously. 'Don't add hypocrisy to your other vices. Don't look me in the face, and pretend not to know. All night long I had you on my conscience; I couldn't close my eyes, for the thought of how demoralised you were. At last I said, I will go to her, I will speak with her, I will labour with her, not in anger but in sorrow, and try to move her to repentance and amendment. But the hard, cynical, burglarious gleam in your eye disheartens me. I'm afraid you're past regeneration. The way you brazen it out! G-give me a glass of *eau sucrée*.'

His voice broke in the travesty of a sob.

'I haven't the remotest idea of what you mean, you know,' I said, as I went about preparing him a glass of *eau sucrée*. His sweet tooth, by the way, was one of Armidis's

peculiarities. He always carried a box of sweetmeats in his pocket, just as another man would carry a packet of cigarettes. But for that matter, he carried both. When he wasn't munching a caramel, or drinking *eau sucrée*, he would certainly be pouring voluminous clouds of smoke from his nostrils.

Again he paid no heed to my protestation. 'How could you do it? How ever could you do it?' he exclaimed. 'It's past my understanding. Only let me tell you this, you cruel, heartless, conscienceless thing—don't you ever try to come your grand airs of innocence and benevolence over me any more. I've found you out, I know you for what you are—a reg'lar bad 'un. You shameless inhabitant of a fifth floor back!'

Then of course I knew what it was.

'Why, who told you?' I cried.

He put on an inscrutable countenance, and spoke in a tone of profound mystery:

'Never mind, never mind. I'll say no more about it. But the next time that you premeditate a crime, just remember this: remember that the most skilfully conducted murder will out, and that there's no concealing anything from ME. That's all; and here comes your father, your poor, helpless, long-enduring father. It's lucky for you I'm not your father. If I were....!' A threatening frown and gesture completed his sentence.

PART II.

JULIAN NORTH.

I.

THERE came a day in that first week of April which so fixed itself upon my memory that whenever I have thought of it since it has returned to my mind as vividly and freshly as if it had been yesterday, and yet which, at the time, I had no reason to suspect would count for more in my life than any of the days that had gone before it.

It was the first real spring day that we had had that year. A wonderful soft breeze blew from the south, all warmth and fragrance; the sky was of a tender shimmering blue, whilst here and there clouds as white and pure as pearls floated in it. The sunlight

was like a vapour of gold, in its rich thick ardour almost palpable. The whole world seemed to sing and quiver in an ecstasy of renewed exuberant life. When you breathed, you were pierced to the quick by an exquisite but indescribable sensation, as if, instead of common air, it were some subtle, heady ether that you inhaled; and your heart was stirred by a multitude of sweet, indefinite regrets and longings, like dim reminiscences or vague presentiments of something very dear, you could not tell what. Joyous forces that had been long asleep in your blood, seemed to awake and go coursing through your veins with turbulent vigour; yet all the while a delicious languor pervaded your senses, so that you felt no desire to do anything but just bide still and exist. It was one of those rare days of early spring when everything, even the vulgarest or most familiar object, becomes wrapped in a rose-coloured glamour,

when the ordinary noises of the street fall upon your ears like music, and the faces of the passers-by seem to glow with an inner poetic light.

My last lesson that day was from two till three in the Avenue Duquesne, near the Invalides; and when, at a little past three o'clock, I left my pupil, and started to walk home, the day was at the very summit of its glory. The magic of it penetrated and enthralled me. The shabby Rue de Babylone, through which I took my way, seemed like a street in fairy-land; the ragged, dirty children who played in the gutters were like little Loves and Cherubs in disguise. I felt as if I walked on air; my heart was singing, and it was as much as I could do to keep from joining it with my voice, and really singing aloud myself.

'How strange!' I thought. 'It is as though some great good fortune had be-

fallen me, I am so happy; yet in reality nothing has happened; everything is just as it was yesterday, just as it will be to-morrow.'

I felt surcharged, tingling to my finger-tips, with glad, buoyant vitality, as if I had drunken a deep draught at the very fountain-head of life.

The scarred and blackened front of St. Sulpice glowed all mellow in the sunshine; and the shop-windows of the *chasubliers* round about had somehow lost their accustomed effect of garish tawdriness, and acquired a dignity and richness of their own. Somewhere out of sight a barrel-organ was monotonously grinding forth the aria of *Ai nostri monti*, from *Trovatore;* even over that my illusion extended itself, and it sounded like dreamy, tender music. For more than a fortnight the buds of the trees in the Luxembourg had been swelling and trying to burst; now, this afternoon, the

whole garden looked as if it had been sprinkled with a delicate green powder. Through the prim alleys children in black pinafores were chasing each other, and shouting in their delight. The terraces, the water, the façade of the palace, the marble Queens of France, bathing themselves in the sun, made a picture that had an indescribable charm and sentiment, like a scene from a poem. When I came out upon the Boulevard St. Michel, all at once my heart gave a leap and thrill, for the air smelt of the asphalte, and it was like a sudden plunge into midsummer. Almost at the same moment, the sun went behind a cloud; a few drops of warm rain pattered down—not enough to wet anybody, but just enough to spice the air with a keen earthy odour.

The 'Boule-Miche' was thronged with people, whom the fine weather had tempted out: soldiers, priests, children with their

bonnes, hatless shop-girls, and of course the inevitable students and *étudiantes*. Everyone looked happy and good-humoured. The doors of the shops and cafés were all open, and in many of them lounged the proprietors or the proprietresses, enjoying the air.

As I entered the Hôtel du St. Esprit, and was about to go upstairs, Madame Pamparagoux darted out of her little box of an office, on the ground-floor, and called after me, 'Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!'

'Yes,' I responded, turning back.

'I have a piece of news to announce to you. Come in and rest for a minute. . . . *Ah! quelle belle journée, n'est-ce pas? Un vrai soleil du midi!*'

She mixed a glass of water and *sirop de groseille*, which she insisted upon my drinking.

'And what is your news?' I asked.

'I have let your room, your old room.

A young gentleman, a young painter, very nice, very handsome, an Englishman, named Norse, Monsieur Julien Norse. I thought you would be glad to know.'

'Yes, I am very glad indeed. I should have been sorry if you had lost by the change I made.'

That is all. And yet that day was one of the red-letter days of my life.

The next day brought a relapse into winter. The sky was heavy with lowering slate-coloured clouds, and a harsh wind blew from the east, and there were occasional flurries of snow.

II.

I AM going to be absolutely frank in this confession: to subdue my pride, overcome my reticence, and tell the whole truth, as well as nothing but the truth. Otherwise it would have no reason for being, it would defeat its own purpose. Therefore I will acknowledge at once what, if I obeyed my woman's instinct, I should deny; namely, that the little piece of news which Madame Pamparagoux imparted to me that afternoon in her office inspired me with a certain amount of curiosity concerning the young English painter who was the hero of it. . . .

oh, but a very tame, a very limited curiosity, indeed, *bien entendu.*

Of course I did not betray this to Madame Pamparagoux. My feminine nature, perhaps my human nature, prompted me to assume a perfect indifference, and withheld me from asking a single question. Yet all the same, I presently surprised myself speculating about him . . . though in a quite mild and passive way.

'*Un jeune monsieur, un jeune peintre, très gentil, très beau, un anglais, nommé Norse, Monsieur Julien Norse.*'

Such was the description she had given of him. I found my imagination busy trying to construct a theory of him from these meagre hints. What would he be like? I remember I said to myself, 'I shall probably see him some day, on the stairs, or somewhere; and then I shall know. But Norse?

Julien Norse? It doesn't sound like a very English name.'

That is honestly as far as my curiosity about him went, at first.

But my father was more eager and less reserved.

'Let us hope,' said he, 'that he is a possible person. Our world is so narrow, any respectable man or woman would be a welcome addition. I must avow, I suffer from the monotony of our life. I *ennuie* myself profoundly. A new face, a new voice, mind, point of view—it will give us a new sensation, a new interest. He is an artist, and he is an Englishman; both of which facts are in his favour. I will leave my card upon him. Eh?'

'I wouldn't if I were you,' I said.

'And why not? You are the one who always says, "No, don't let's."'

'Well, at all events, I would wait until we

have seen him, until we have formed some notion of his style. He may be, you know, like our other neighbours, quite out of the question.'

'But Madame Pamparagoux describes him as . . .'

'Oh, Madame Pamparagoux! Her standard is so different to ours.'

'True, true. Ah, well, we will leave it to time, we will leave it to Destiny! *Che sarà sarà.*'

Many days passed, however, and he still remained but a name to us. My father would occasionally hear him, early in the morning or late at night, moving about his room; but for the rest, he did not manifest himself in any manner.

'That young man in the next room to your father's, how he works!' cried Madame Pamparagoux, once when I met her in the vestibule. 'He has his coffee every morn-

ing at seven, and leaves the house before eight. He works all day at Julien's, and never comes home before midnight. He burns his candle at both ends. Some day he will be sorry.'

At another time, as I was passing through the hall, she ran out from her little office and exclaimed, '*Tenez, Mademoiselle!* It appears that M'sieu' your father has made a conquest. That young man in your old room, the young English painter, Monsieur Norse, to-day he asked me, "Who is the superb old gentleman I have just passed upon the stairs? He has altogether the air of a *grand seigneur*, with his noble carriage and magnificent head. I should like to paint him. What a Bayard he would make!" '

My father did not disguise his pleasure when I reported this compliment to him.

'Something tells me that we shall like the young fellow,' he said.

But he protested that he could not remember having passed any young man upon the stairs.

Then for nearly a week my father was confined to the house by an ugly cough, and every evening I went alone to the Concombre Rose, and had our dinner packed up in a basket, which I brought away, to be eaten in our room.

One evening—I being rather later than usual—a young man left the restaurant at the same moment with myself. When I reached the Hôtel du St. Esprit, behold . . . the same young man entered it after me. I heard his footstep behind me on the stairs. As I had my hand upon the knob of my father's door, the young man passed me, and went into the next room.

'So! That is he. That is our young English painter,' I said to myself.

'Well, and what does he turn out to be

like?' demanded my father, when I had told him of our chance encounter.

'He is sufficiently well-looking, though scarcely handsome, as Madame said. He is tall and strongly built, but he stoops a good deal. An intelligent face, nose rather aquiline, deep-set eyes, whose colour I could not distinguish, though they had the effect of dark brown or black, dark complexion, and dark brown hair, moustache, and beard, the beard being trimmed to a point.'

'S-s-s-s!' my father hissed, impatiently. 'You give me a catalogue of material details which signify nothing, being disorganised, unsynthesised. What do I care for the colour of his eyes, the shape of his beard? Does he look pleasant? Does he look interesting? Does he look possible? Is he of our kind? Or is he insipid, commonplace, vulgar, like the others?'

'Oh, no, he doesn't look insipid, and by

no means commonplace or vulgar. He looks interesting, yes; and refined. He has an air. He looks clever, and like . . . well, a gentleman, in short.'

'You are very unsatisfactory. I am surprised that, inheriting as you do excellent powers of observation from me, you should be so little able to convey your impressions to another mind. I do not obtain the faintest conception of him from all that you have said. I despair of doing so; therefore you need make no further attempt to describe him, but tell me in one word whether he struck you as a man it would be agreeable for us to make a friend of?'

'He struck me as a promising person, a man who would have something to say, yes.'

We had naturally spoken to Armidis of our neighbour, and he had joined in our

conjectures anent him with a vivacity that was characteristic of his fresh childlike temperament.

'But,' he said, 'the fun of it all is that he is just ten times as curious about you as you can possibly be about him. He's just dying to make your acquaintance, poor young man, and he can't think how to set to work. Of course Madame Pamparagoux has turned herself inside out. A Russian nobleman in exile, suspected of Nihilistic affiliations, and a lovely Russian girl, his daughter. The other fellow, the constant visitor, with the peachy complexion, the white hair, the bland smile, that is Armidis—yes, Armidis the composer, whose songs you know and admire. Is it romantic, at least? Does it appeal to the imagination? Then he's been struck by your appearance, remember. Who is the superb old man? A Bayard, *parbleu!* And the young woman, ah! the young

woman with the eyes, and the skin, and the hair! . . .'

I tried here to interpolate a sarcasm to the effect that these were very extraordinary possessions indeed; but Armidis hurried on without heeding me. . . .

'He's a painter, a painter mind you. Therefore he has the artistic temperament, he has a soul for colour. He would give his right hand to know you. He is at his wits' ends to find a method of attack. Why? Why can't he come up and scrape acquaintance with you without preliminaries? Oh, because this is such a horrid, self-conscious, stupid, cut-and-dried, conventional world. We haven't the courage of our instincts, of our natural spontaneous impulses. We are the slaves of tradition; we wear our ceremonies like fetters. We daren't be ourselves. Ugh! It is heart-rending.'

A few evenings later we had just

established ourselves, Armidis, my father, and I, in our regular places at the Concombre Rose, when Mr. Julien Norse came into the restaurant, and took a seat at a table at the opposite side of the room.

'There he is,' I announced in an undertone. 'That is he.'

'*Tiens!*' cried my father, looking over at him with all his eyes.

'Oh, no, not really,' protested Armidis. 'How can you seek so to practise on our ignorance?'

'But it is, really,' I insisted.

'Oh, but then, cruel! What did you want to libel the poor young creature for? You told us he was English.'

'Why, but so he is.'

'Oh, no, never, never. He's never a Briton. He may be a Russian, or a Frenchman, Turk, or Prussian, but he's not an Englishman. He hasn't the English cut at all.

Not the English physiognomy, nor the English way of moving, nor the English anything. *Moi, je connais ça comme ma poche, vous savez.* Heartless wretch! You might as well tell us he's Chinese.'

'But Madame Pamparagoux. . . .'

'Tut, tut! Don't Madame Pamparagoux me! How dare you? Her effrontery, *pardieu!* Madame Pamparagoux, indeed! As if I didn't know! Intimidation! . . . However, the slander shall be nailed. I'm going over to ask him. I shan't allow him to rest under any such imputation. At least I shall afford him an opportunity to clear himself. Fair play! At the same time I shall say, "Look here, my fine fellow, you're dying to know the Banakins, and the Banakins are dying to know you, especially Mademoiselle, who pines for an interesting man. *Allons*, let us put an end to this strained and ridiculous, not to say pathetic, situation. Let us

emancipate ourselves. Come with me. I will present you. You shall finish your dinner at our table."... He will want to hug me.'

He rose to his feet, as if to carry out his threat.

'If you do anything of the kind,' I said between my teeth, 'I will kill you.'

He flung me a defiant laugh from over his shoulder, and, to the unspeakable consternation of my father and myself, off he went, with a comical mincing gait, straight across the room to the table of the young man, where he boldly sat down, and began to talk. As he talked, the young man first looked puzzled, then he smiled, then laughed outright, finally got up, and next moment he and Armidis were bearing down upon us, arm in arm.

I felt as if my cheeks were afire.

'Allow me, Mr. Banakin, Miss Banakin,

to present Mr. Julian North,' said Armidis, with a grand flourish. 'It's been a chapter of sad misunderstandings, from the first. And all because you would accept the testimony of an incompetent witness. Let it be a lesson to you. Julien Norse, forsooth! And English into the bargain! Oh, dear, what is the world coming to? Mr. North is an American, a free-born American, and he is shameless enough to glory in it. Madame Pamparagoux! ... Do you know'—he addressed the young man, but he pointed to me, shaking his fat forefinger—'do you know, she tried to bully and cower me into admitting that you were English. Fancy! As if I couldn't tell! Oh, she's capable of anything, anything. Sit down. Here comes your soup.'

Poor Mr. North looked rather embarrassed, but he managed to make a sufficiently graceful bow, and then to deposit

himself in a chair. There was a moment of silence—awkward enough. But Armidis terminated it by beginning to laugh—his merry, musical, contagious laughter. We all laughed. We had almost a *fou-rire*. It was a good thing. It cleared the air.

'We are very glad to know you, Mr. North,' my father said. 'If you are from America, no doubt we have acquaintances in common. For ten years I had an American instructress for my daughter, a most talented and accomplished woman, one Miss Goodale — Miss Laura Goodale. Perhaps you know her, or her family.'

'No,' returned Mr. North, taking the question, which seemed to me rather far-fetched, with the most respectful seriousness, and speaking with an air of deliberation, 'I cannot remember anybody of that name. But perhaps—perhaps we come from different parts of the country.'

He had a singularly sweet voice, and scarcely any American accent; but he spoke with a slight hesitation, not quite a drawl, as if he might at one time have been troubled with stammering, but had cured himself.

'She came from Boston,' said my father.

'Ah, yes. I come from New York.'

'Of which Boston is a suburb, no?'

'It would make a . . . well, then, a . . . a B . . . Bostonian feel very sad to hear me answer yes,' he replied.

The difficulty that he had with the B of Boston confirmed my impression that he stammered a little.

'Are you to be long in Paris?' Armidis inquired.

'Six months or so. I have been here three years and a half already, and I came to stay four.'

'Oh, then you are an old Parisian; and

we thought you had just arrived. Human error!'

'I have just changed my lodgings, that's all. I was at the Hôtel de Carthage, Rue Gay-Lussac, but I had a misunderstanding with the landlady, and had to move. I've been dining here at the Concombre Rose these two years on and off. I have often seen you here, and wish . . . well, then, wish . . . well, then, wished that I might know you.'

When he hesitated in his speech, it was his habit to help himself over the rough place by repeating 'Well, then,' until he could go on. I don't know why, but the effect of his half-stammer was somehow pleasant.

'Oh, dear,' sighed Armidis, 'what a contrary world! Two years lost irrecoverably! Why—why didn't you come up and speak to us?'

'I never should have dared.'

'*De l'audace, de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace!*' cried Armidis. 'Consider me.'

'Yes . . . but . . . *pas trop d'audace,*' rejoined Mr. North.

'Well, his impidence!' exclaimed Armidis, drawing himself up with mock resentment, and appealing to my father and me. 'I like that. *Trop d'audace,* indeed! To snub me in this public manner!'

'I have, as you see,' confessed Mr. North, 'a great talent for . . . well, as the French say, for putting my foot in my plate.'

This set us all off laughing again. When sobriety was restored, my father took the word.

'You had in mind, no doubt, Mr. North, the inscriptions over the three gates of Busyrane,' he suggested.

'No. What were they?' the young man wondered.

'They are quoted somewhere from Spenser by your American writer Emerson. Over the first gate it was written, Be bold. And over the second gate, Be bold, be bold, and evermore be bold. But then, over the third gate, Be not too bold!'

My father made his little point with great gusto, and in his stateliest, courtliest manner, punctuating it with a bow. I could see that the young man looked at him with admiring eyes, and listened to him with deference: for all which I liked him none the less. My father, perceiving the same thing, was encouraged to continue. . . .

'In happier days, sir, when I found my dearest occupation and distraction in my library, I was equally an earnest lover and an industrious student of the works of your immortal Emerson. I even translated some of his poems, most inadequately, into the Russian language. But nowadays, alas, I

have little time for such pleasures. My daughter and I are both, in our respective paths, condemned to take part in the struggle for existence. You must know that we are unfortunate enough to be in exile.'

'Yes, I know that; and I hope . . .' He hesitated, and coloured up. . . . 'I hope you will let me say that I honour you for it. It seems to me that no decent man could help being a Nihilist, if he lived in Russia.'

'Look out! Where is your foot now?' cried Armidis, laughing.

'A Nihilist?' my father repeated, at the same time. 'Oh, no, let us hope not. I should like to explain to you. . . .'

And he seized the occasion to set forth in some detail his differences with the Nihilists, or Revolutionists, and to explain the causes of his own residence abroad.

'All the same,' said Mr. North, when he had done, 'if you will allow me to say so, I

think I should be a Nihilist, if I lived in Russia. I could not take a reasonable or philosophic view of things, if I lived in Russia. I had a friend here in Paris, a Russian, a sculptor—he's dead now, poor fellow ; died of consumption—who prejudiced me a good deal. It was a long story, but the point of it was this. When he was a lad, fifteen or sixteen years old, his mother was . . . well, then . . . his mother was . . . well, then . . . flogged to death, by order of the Governor, or chief man, or whatever he is called, of the district where they lived. I'm sure I should be a Nihilist, I should be for exterminating the whole tree, root and branch, if I lived in a country where they do things like that.'

'Oh, how horrible, how horrible!' I cried involuntarily.

'My opinion sums itself up in three words,' said my father. 'It is worse than futile to

fight the Devil with fire. You cannot overcome evil with evil. Things are wrong in Russia; that, unfortunately, must be admitted; but dynamite, terrorism, anarchy, are equally wrong; and two wrongs do not make a right.'

'Oh, goodness, gracious me!' expostulated Armidis, grievously, writhing in his chair. 'When are you going to finish? I've stood it in silence just as long as I can. So horrid! Such a shocking subject! What have we done to deserve it? And at dinner, too! When we ought to forget that there are such things as pain and evil in the world. Do let's talk of something else. Let's smoke: smoke's a disinfectant. Here — here are cigarettes.' Whilst he held out a paper of cigarettes with one hand, he dropped five lumps of sugar into his cup of black coffee with the other. 'What shall we do to recover our frivolity? Let's—let's go over to my rooms and have some music.'

To this proposition, after some little debate, we assented unanimously; and, as the evening was mild, we proceeded to the Avenue de la Grande Armée on the roof of an omnibus. Having seen us comfortably established in his work-room, Armidis begged us to excuse him for a little, alleging that he had to go out to make a few *emplettes*—it was a favourite word of his; I never knew him to use the English, purchases.

'What a joy he is,' said Mr. North, after he had gone. 'I don't know when I have met anybody so . . . so *invraisemblable*, or so fascinating.'

'*Invraisemblable!* It is exactly the word for him,' cried my father.

'What's more, he's as good and kind as he is surprising and entertaining,' said I.

'Oh, for that—*pas mal*,' my father acquiesced.

'Of course,' Mr. North went on, 'I've

known him by reputation this long while. Everybody knows his music. But the man himself is an experience. I had always supposed he was French, or something. The name sounds so—Victor Armidis. Yet he turns out to be an Englishman.'

'Half English, half Greek,' I explained.

'However, he is more English than anything else,' put in my father. 'He was born in England, and educated there. He has never lived in Greece; I doubt if he has ever even been there. Of late years he has spent most of his time in France and Italy. But he is really of no nation, of no class or variety. He is *sui generis*. A freak of nature. What you call a sport, a spontaneous variation. He prides himself upon acknowledging no fatherland, upon being a citizen of no country, a subject of no throne. I remember once I quoted to him in jest those lines of Sir Walter Scott—

'"Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land?"

whereupon Armidis instantly responded, "Yes, I am that man."'

'I'm sure I never can thank him enough for coming up and speaking to me this evening,' said Mr. North.

'Oh, his *sang-froid*, his impudence, is unrivalled,' observed my father. 'And that was a fair specimen of it. I should be curious to learn how he excused himself to you.'

'Why, that was just the beauty of it. He didn't excuse himself at all. He simply sat down at my table, and said quietly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, "Good-evening. Hadn't you better come and sit with us? It's bad for the . . . bad for the . . . well, then . . . the digestion to eat alone. My companions—you know who they are, your neighbours. As for me, my name is

Armidis, Victor Armidis, if you set any store by names. The Banakins will vouch for my respectability, though appearances are against me; or I can refer you to my banker. I see you're an American . . ." Of course I was overjoyed.'

At this juncture we were interrupted by the return of our host.

'Well,' he demanded, 'is there anything left of my character? Or have you talked it all to shreds and tatters? . . . Materials for a supper; we'll be hungry by-and-by,' he added, referring to a basket that he carried on his arm. 'Now you two men,' he went on, 'are only here as chaperons. Monica Paulovna and I are going to make a joyful noise, but you needn't feel under the slightest obligation to listen. You may talk together, if you like, or you may read. Here's literature,' and he threw an armful of books down upon the floor between them.

Then he led me to the piano, and began to sing over various of his recent songs to my accompaniment. After that he sang several other songs, not of his own composition. Finally, at his request, I played a little. And so we went on till past eleven o'clock. The two chaperons, meantime, disdained the books that Armidis had offered them, and formed a very attentive audience, giving us the benefit of their comments and applause.

'Now let us sup,' said our composer.

He cleared the litter from off his table, sweeping most of it summarily upon the floor, and opening his basket, proceeded to lay its contents out in a row. First came a magnum of champagne; then a paper of sweet cakes and pastries; then a cube of galantine, a loaf of bread, a pot of paté-de-foies-gras, a box of marrons-glacés, and another of assorted bonbons.

After which he left the room for a minute, and when he came back he bore a big tray, covered with knives and forks, dishes and glasses.

'Now, then, to the table,' he cried. 'And everyone to his taste.'

He popped the cork out of the magnum and filled our glasses . . .

Oh, we had a merry supper. We sat over it, talking and laughing, till almost one o'clock. Armidis consumed an incredible quantity of sweets, smoked an incredible number of cigarettes, said an incredible number of amusing things, and imbibed quite half the champagne—dissolving, if you please, three or four lumps of sugar in every glass, for which my father called him a heathen, whilst he plaintively defended himself by saying, 'Ingratitude! I go and get *vin brut*, sour enough to melt a Christian's teeth, because I'm unselfish, and I know that

the Historian of Russia, being an ascetic, prefers it so; and then he makes faces and snubs me and calls me naughty names, because I temper it to the shorn lamb. Viper!' And all the while his face, with its beautiful bright eyes, its pink and white complexion, and its fleecy hair and beard, glowed like an incarnation of happiness and good-humour.

'I would as soon think of sugaring this galantine,' said my father.

'Well, and why not?' retorted Armidis. 'I assure you it's very good with sugar.'

'Good!' gasped my father. 'I believe there is no length to which you would not go for the sake of a paradox. I—I defy you to try it.'

'Needless to defy me. I was going to do it anyhow,' said Armidis, with perfect coolness. Whereupon, he cut off a generous slice of galantine, snowed it over with soft

sugar, and deliberately ate it, with every sign of hearty relish.

'It is too much, too much,' sighed my father, rising. 'After that we must beat a retreat. Who can tell what he may not do next? I cannot feel that we are safe in his abode.'

So we put on our things to go home.

'I'll escort you to your door,' said Armidis.

And late as it was, he did so. He hailed a Victoria in the street, and in that, while he and Mr. North occupied the strapontin, we were whirled across the town to the Rue St. Jacques.

At our door he asked Mr. North, 'Are you in a hurry to go to bed? If not, prithee come and take a walk with me. I, for my part, never go to bed till daylight. The day is the best time to sleep; and three or four in the afternoon is the proper time for rising.

Let us go for a walk. We will talk over the Banakins.'

So, whilst my father and I were climbing up stairs towards our bedrooms, he and Mr. North were walking off arm in arm in the direction of the Boulevard.

III.

THENCEFORTH we saw a great deal of Julian North. He became, in fact, a member of our little circle. Almost every evening he formed one of our party at the Concombre Rose; then, after dinner, he would very likely go with us for a stroll through the Luxembourg, in the soft spring twilight, and when it got dark, perhaps he would return with us to the Hôtel du St.-Esprit, to finish the evening in my father's room. As the season advanced, moreover, we would spend the fine Sundays that came in the country somewhere,—at Nogent-sur-Marne perhaps, perhaps in the Bois de Meudon, sometimes

as far away as Fontainebleau, sometimes no farther than Suresnes, — and it was seldom that Mr. North did not accompany us.

On that first night of our acquaintance the ice between him and myself had scarcely got broken. But only the next afternoon, as I was leaving a house in the Boulevard Haussmann, where I had given my last lesson for that day, whom should I meet almost at the door but Mr. North! And after we had greeted each other, and exclaimed upon the coincidence that had brought us together, it turned out that we were both upon our way home; whereupon he said, laughing, 'Really, I don't see but you will have to let me walk with you.'

So we walked home together through the lovely spring weather; and as we walked we talked; and somehow we seemed to draw each other out, so that very soon we were talking as eagerly and freely as if we had

been old friends. At first we talked of Armidis, and he told me how the composer had kept him up, tramping the streets with him, till four o'clock in the morning, entertaining him with a flow of quaint paradox and whimsical drollery. Then we talked of my father, for whom he professed an enthusiastic admiration, saying that he was the most beautiful old man he had ever seen. Then we talked of Art, discovering upon that theme many ideas, ideals, likes, and dislikes in common; then of Paris, of the Parisians, of France and the French, of our Latin Quarter, of the Hôtel du St.-Esprit, the Concombre Rose, the manifold pleasantnesses and unpleasantnesses of Bohemia: at last of ourselves.

I remember, while we were speaking of the French, I said that I liked French women very much, but that French men were odious to me. He answered to this, 'Oh, no, you

are a little unjust. Frenchmen, if you bar out their attitude towards women, are very good fellows. But a Frenchman regards a woman as if she were a piece of bread.'

He paused, as if he had finished; and I asked, 'How do you mean?'

'Why, first he wants to butter her, and then eat her,' he said, which struck me as rather good.

At last we talked of ourselves. By insensible degrees we had drifted to the ground of personalities and confidences; and almost before I was aware of what I had done, I had told him of my work as a teacher, of its difficulties and anxieties, of its compensations, and of my secret aspirations as a musician; whilst he had told me of his work at Julien's, of the studio he shared with two friends in the Boulevard de Clichy,—'Whence I had just come when I had the good fortune to meet you,' he said,—of the picture he had

sent to the Salon, and how he hoped it would be well hung, but supposed it wouldn't be, and how, if only somebody should be inspired to buy it, he could prolong his stay in Paris for a while, whereas, otherwise, he would have to return to America in the autumn,—'Because then I shall have finished my four years as a Valentine prizeman, and my allowance will come to a deadly stand-still, and I must go home to join in the scramble for bread and butter.' A certain Mr. Valentine, he explained, had died, and by his will had left a sum of money to establish the Valentine Prize Fund, the income of which was to maintain perpetually four American art-students in Paris, each receiving three thousand francs a year for four years; and every autumn one of the scholarships fell vacant, and was thrown open to competition; and in the competition of 1879 Mr. North had been the winner.

We did not walk very fast; indeed, we sauntered along in a most leisurely fashion, stopping every now and then to look into a shop-window, or to admire some street vista, or some effect of light and shadow, or to watch some of the many tragedies and comedies that are always to be witnessed on the Paris pavements; and thus it took us considerably more than an hour to reach the Rue St.-Jacques; and by that time we had quite forgotten that we were mere acquaintances, who had only met the day before.

I remember that when I was alone in my room, after that walk and talk, I felt wonderfully exhilarated and elated, and that I could not help singing as I went about the things I had to do.

We all agreed that our life was fuller and pleasanter for his entrance into it. My father called him a precious acquisition. 'I cannot quite make him out,' he added. 'He has

perfectly the manners and the little traits and habits of a man of our own world. In his dress, in his carriage, in a thousand small ways which cannot be defined, though they are unmistakable, as well as in the fine drawing and modelling of his face, he reveals the gentleman, the man not only with breeding and education, but with a pedigree. You cannot make a gentleman in one, two, no, not even in three generations, any more than you can make a gentleman's park. Some centuries are required. This young man is a gentleman in the old, the proper sense of the word. Yet here he is living the life of nothing more nor less than a poor Bohemian art-student; lodging in the Hôtel du St.-Esprit, dining at the Concombre Rose, evincing his poverty by a hundred signs. *Ça m'intrigue.* You know I am not romantic, my reason is always paramount to my imagination; yet sometimes, when I observe him,

I say to myself, I will lay a wager that this is some *grand seigneur* in disguise.'

'They don't have *grands seigneurs* in America,' said Armidis; 'and as for your sage observations about gentlemen and gentlemen's parks, it seems to me that somewhere in the course of my reading I have once or twice before met with a like sentiment, similarly expressed. . . . But North is apparently a very respectable young person, and certainly a good listener, which is more important. He's disgracefully round-shouldered, and he hasn't flesh enough, and he's too enthusiastic, especially on the subject of Whistler's painting, and on that of Monica Paulovna's hair. But his eyes are honest and intelligent, his forehead is well shaped, he has a sweet mouth, and very nice nervous hands. His voice is pleasant, his suppressed stammer adds a note of pathos, and his accent is singularly decent for an American.

He has a good deal of humour, and keenly appreciates my best things. Whether he can paint or not, we'll know when the Salon opens. Meantime, let's enjoy him.'

To me, when my father was not present, Armidis said, with a quizzical laugh, 'For you, my dear, he'll be a valuable, though probably in the long run a painful experience. Oh, I see how things are moving. Fie, fie! You pale women with the red hair are the very deuce and all where men are concerned; and those melancholy, artistic, grand-seigneurish fellows, with the pointed beards, are terribly dangerous to female hearts. But I'll thank you to remember that except for me he'd have remained a stranger to you. Poor young thing!'

I paid no attention to Armidis's insinuations. That they might have a soul of seriousness under their appearance of levity, did not occur to me. I liked Mr. North

very much indeed. I found him extremely interesting. His stammer, and a certain air of sadness that he had, made me feel sorry for him. And I realised that, until we knew him, there had been a great void in my life, due to my having no friend or companion of anything like my own age, but of which I had not been clearly conscious until now that it was filled. It seemed perfectly natural that in our little party of four he and I should usually pair off together, leaving Armidis and my father to each other.

When the Salon opened we all went with him to see his picture.

'It is on the line,' he said, 'which is better luck than I ever dared to dream of... For the rest...?'

He expressed the point of interrogation by a suspension of the voice, a shrug as of resignation, and a glance as of questioning despair.

The title of his picture was *Une Rêverie;* and it represented a woman, life-size, nude, lying at full length upon a tiger skin, a wealth of black hair in disarray over her shoulders and down her breast, a half emptied demie-tasse of coffee at her elbow, a yellow-covered novel laid face downwards on the floor at her side, with her right hand resting on it, and between the pink fingers of her other hand a lighted cigarette, while from her lips a delicate stream of smoke wound upwards, and her eyes followed it with an expression of dreamy, sensuous languor. It was painted in the most advanced realistic manner, with a broad, free stroke, very vigorous, very effective; the drawing was faultless, the flesh full of life and blood, the atmosphere so palpable, so warm and humid, that it never suggested itself to you to think, 'She would be cold.'

'Your technique deserves all praise,' said

my father. 'Drawing, modelling, colouring, textures, values, are irreproachable. But, if you will permit me to be frank, I do not like your point of view. Mark that I find no fault with your subject,—a nude woman, lazily enjoying herself with her novel and her cigarette, is a perfectly good subject,—only with the point of view from which you have treated it. It is too material, too literal, it lacks that spiritual note which should always be present in art. It represents life, but it offers no criticism upon it.'

'Tut, tut!' cried Armidis. 'Heresy! The point of view is right. Criticism of life! Philistine! Bourgeois!... Kindred spirit, brother Pagan, accept the hand of fellowship.'

He shook the painter by the hand.

'I regret but one thing,' he went on; 'and that is your title. Your title is literary, it suggests a story, and is therefore to be deplored. However, I forgive you that

offence, if you will never do so any more. The treatment, if you will permit *me* to be frank, is very fresh and discriminating, but a little, just a little, young. It may receive an honourable mention; you see they have hung it with respect; it could not be better hung. But if you hope that it will find a purchaser, you are storing up a disappointment for yourself. It is over the heads of the people who buy pictures. They too are Philistines. They too will demand a criticism of life, a point of view. I see you have French blood in your veins.'

'Why, how can you tell that?' Mr. North queried, in manifest surprise.

'Am I blind? How can I tell that you have a nose on your face?'

'Why, do I look French? I never knew that before.'

'Look French indeed! Hear him. *Vaniteux!* No, you look like a Yankee

of the Yankees,—*tout-ce qu'il y a de plus Yankee.* But you draw too well. The French twist to your brush. And then no Yankee, no Anglo-Saxon, could have been so inexorably true to his art, could so relentlessly have left the sentimental element out of his picture, the criticism of life, the point of view. No Teuton, in short. The painter of pure Teutonic race must always either preach a sermon or tell a story. You have done neither. You have assimilated the French idea too perfectly, not to have a French ancestor somewhere up your family tree.'

'How do you account for the fact that the greatest living painter, he who is most strictly and purely an Artist, and nothing but an Artist, happens to be a Teuton, an Anglo-Saxon, and a Yankee?'

'If it were true, I should account for it simply by saying that no rules apply to great

geniuses, that Genius by its very nature is an exception to all rules, and a law unto itself. But, my dear fellow, your premisses are false: the gentleman to whom you refer is not a Teuton, is not an Anglo-Saxon. He may have a tithe of Anglo-Saxon blood flowing remotely somewhere in his body, but all that goes to his brain is Celtic, which he inherits from his ancestors the McNeills. However, this is trifling. You evade my question. Confess, are you not partially French?'

'Half French,' he confessed. 'My mother was French.'

I thought, as he pronounced that word, mother, his voice softened almost imperceptibly, and trembled a little.

As we were walking home,—my father and Armidis leading us by some little distance,—he said to me, 'I see you didn't like it. I don't wonder. I shall never paint anything in that vein again. Your father was

right. It's sordid, it's of the earth earthy. It has no spirit, no significance, no point. You look at it just as you would listen to an anecdote ; then you ask, "Well, what of it ? What's the point ?" I meant to paint a woman ; I realise now that I have painted simply an animal, the female of the *genus homo*. But you see,—I don't know whether you will like what I am going to say, but it's the truth,—you see, I did it before . . . well, then, before . . . before I knew you. Yes, that is it. Before I knew you. My ideas have changed a good deal since then. I've had some new light.'

I made no reply to this speech of his. It embarrassed me ; it filled me with a vague uneasiness : yet neither the embarrassment nor the uneasiness was altogether unpleasant. It was as if he had touched an exquisitely sensitive spot, that tingled at the touch, yet somehow craved to be touched again.

'By Jove,' he exclaimed suddenly, 'when I tell myself the simple fact, that only a fortnight ago we didn't know each other, had never even spoken to each other,—oh, it's preposterous, it's incredible. How mysterious it is, the way years pass, and you live your life in a sufficiently contented fashion, never realising that there is anything wanting to it, and then one day you meet somebody, in a most casual manner, a lot of sheer accidents having led up to it, and, the first thing you know, that person has become a power in your life, perhaps *the* power, the determining influence, in relation to whom all the meaning and purpose of your life shape themselves! And then you can't realise that you had ever really lived at all before that day. Your former existence has sunken away, into oblivion and indifference, like the months before you were born. All your former ambitions seem so trivial, your former

pains and pleasures, hopes and fears, so absurdly petty and insignificant. It's terrifying: because you can't help thinking, What if that accident hadn't happened to happen? What, —for instance,—what if I hadn't just happened to hit on the Hôtel du St.-Esprit, among all the hotels of the Latin Quarter? What if I had gone elsewhere than to the Concombre Rose for my dinner that night a fortnight or so ago! It takes my breath away. How strange it is! I can't help half believing in destiny after all. Why, it's too humiliating to believe that these very most decisive crises in one's existence are the results of pure blind chance, isn't it?'

He said all this rather in the tone of a man soliloquising, than in that of a man addressing an interlocutor, so again I was spared the necessity of answering. But his words sank into my mind, and many times

afterwards came back to me, the subject of reflection and speculation.

This much I may say with all truth: that I supposed of course he meant by the pronoun 'you' not me alone, but our party, Armidis and my father and myself.

IV.

One evening, in the Jardin du Luxembourg, he told me something of his life before he had come to Paris.

My father and Armidis were seated, smoking and chatting, at one of the tables of the little café: Mr. North and I were walking up and down the terrace by the fountain, within sight of them, but out of hearing. The air was warm and still; the distant, muffled murmur of the town was like a soft undertone, to which the occasional liquid notes of the birds in the trees furnished a pleasant desultory counterpoint; there was a dim pink light in the sky above the house-tops, re-

flected from the sunset. I had spoken of my mother, whom I could just vaguely remember, a pale beautiful face smiling upon me in my childhood. Then he spoke to me of his.

She was French, he said; not of France, but of New Orleans, in America,—a Créole. In 1858 she had married his father, Eustace North, and left the south to go and live in New York, where her husband was a barrister. . . .

'It was the wildest sort of a love-match. She belonged to a family of the most devout Catholics, while his people were of the sternest sect of New England Puritans. They had to run away together, and it was years before their parents relented, and then they did so only in a half-hearted way. She was eighteen when she married, and scarcely nineteen when I was born. I never felt that she was very much older than myself. She had

the gift of perpetual youth, of perpetual girlhood. She died when she was thirty-eight, and I was then almost a grown man.'

He said that she was not only the sweetest and the gentlest woman he had known in all his life,—'With that gentleness and sweetness that are almost peculiar to a certain type of Frenchwoman,'—but she was also the most beautiful and the most brilliant. . . .

'I used to sit still and look at her for hours at a stretch, just revelling in her wonderful beauty; and I have never heard anyone, man or woman, talk as she could talk: with such wisdom, such wit, such lightness of touch, such simplicity, and yet such warmth and colour. She had temperament and imagination. When I would read a story or a fairy-tale, I always thought of the heroine as being like my mother. I loved her not only with the tenderness, the affection, that one naturally gives one's mother, but with an intensity,

an ardour, that amounted to a passion, an adoration. She fascinated me, dazzled me. She was like one of my fairy-princesses in flesh and blood. And so kind with it all, so untiringly kind and good to me! . . . Well, then, as time went on, as I grew older, I began to realise that my father, . . . well, then, . . . well, then, hate . . . well, then, that my father hated me. He had always been very stern and distant with me, and little by little, as I cut my wisdom-teeth, it dawned upon me, it was borne in upon me, that I was hateful to him. He was a very quiet, undemonstrative man, apparently very cold; but it was really a case of still waters running deep, of fire in ice. He had an intensely passionate nature, and he worshipped his wife like a lover, and he hated me as a lover might hate a rival. I came gradually to understand this, and I saw that she knew it too. If he was present, she would hardly

notice me, or would do so only *à la dérobée*, when his back was turned, or he didn't happen to be looking. Then, when he was absent, she would take me to her, and cover me with kisses, and tears, and caresses, as if to make up to me for her neglect. Oh, I wasn't exuberantly happy. . . .'

He interrupted himself long enough to roll a cigarette; but when he had finished it, instead of lighting it, he suddenly crumpled it up in his hand, and threw it away. Then he went on. . . .

'She had always been very frail and delicate; and at last she began to keep to the house, and then to her room, and then to her bed. She was fading away little by little. My father used to go about the house, speaking to no one, wringing his hands, and staggering almost as though he was drunk. Oh, it was frightful. Just before Christmas, 1878, she died. . . . I didn't see my father for

many days, nearly a fortnight. He hid himself in his bedroom all that time. Then one evening he sent word for me to come to him in the library. He was very pale, and thin, and old-looking; and his eyes — oh, they were terrible, so wild, so desperate. I went towards him, impulsively, with my hands stretched out. But he stopped me. "Only a word, only one word," he said. "I have only one word to speak to you." I waited, and at last he went on. This is what he said to me. He said, "Your mother is dead. You have killed her. Yes, just as certainly as if you had stabbed her, as if you had poisoned her. Why did you ever come into the world, to thrust yourself between her and me, to rob me of her, first of her love, and then of her life? You have killed her. She never loved me after your birth as she had before it; and ever since, she has been failing, failing. She never recovered from

the pain you caused her,—yes, you! For nineteen years, nineteen years, I, I who loved her, I have had to watch her dying inch by inch,—all thanks to you. And now she's dead. Only thirty-eight years old, in the very prime of her womanhood, and she is dead. Oh, you may guess how I love you.... Now I want you to go away. I can't bear to see you, to feel that you are in the house. Go away. Wherever you please, only somewhere out of my sight, out of my hearing. I will make you an allowance, as much as you please. Only go. Go, and save me from the necessity of seeing you, of being reminded of you. That is all. That is what I sent for you to say."'

Mr. North paused for a moment; then, abruptly, he hurried on, 'Of course after that, after he had spoken to me in that way, I had no idea of taking an allowance from him. I had known for a long time that he

wasn't fond of me, but I had never dreamed that it was as bad as that; that he held me responsible for my mother's illness: he had never spoken to me on the subject before, and I had only felt in a general way that he disliked me. Now, what he had said rankled. My pride got up, and I was hot with resentment.... I was within a year or so of getting my degree at Columbia College; but I'd always wanted to be a painter, and I dare say I had neglected my classics a good deal to work in the studio of an old Frenchman, Monsieur Oudinelle, who was established in New York. So, after that talk with my father, I left college, and went in for painting in deadlier earnest than ever. And in September I was lucky enough to win the Valentine Prize. Meantime my father had written to me, offering to settle an annuity upon me, and I had written back, rather fiercely I am afraid, declining. My pride

was still up. Now I wrote him again, just three words, telling him that I was about to go abroad. That letter he never answered. . . . After I'd been here about a year, I received one day by post from New York a document, sealed with a red seal, which proved to be what they call a citation to attend the probate of his will. It was the first intimation I had had of his death. By his will he left all of his property to various charities, all of it, nothing to me. Though, after all, I can't say that I minded that especially; I could have contested the will, you know, and very possibly broken it: but my pride was still up. The worst of it is, I've never been able to get it out of my mind that perhaps what he said was true. I've never been able to get that out of my mind. I see her face, her beautiful, sad face, I see it white and worn with suffering; and then I think, Yes, very likely what he said was true, and I was the

cause of it all. My life has been purchased at the price of her broken health and death.'

He told me this as we paced backwards and forwards through the gathering dusk along the terrace that borders the basin of the great fountain in the Luxembourg. It did not occur to me to think it strange that he should be telling it to me; it seemed the most natural thing in the world. After he had done we continued to walk up and down, side by side, for a while, without speaking. He had told his story with an attempt at coolness, even indifference; but it was plain to me that he was deeply moved. My heart yearned out towards him with a strong compassionate emotion, that yet somehow was not altogether sad. It was nearly dark; only a thin streak of dull red, low down in the west, was left of the gloaming. Presently he stood still, and leaned over the stone

balustrade that fences the terrace, and looked off across the water. I could see, dark as it was, that he was very pale. I waited at his side, not daring to speak, but longing in some way to be of comfort to him. . . .

Suddenly, he put out his hand, and took mine, and held it for a minute with a gentle pressure. I did not think of drawing my hand away, or of resenting his taking it. It seemed as though the pity for him, pent in my heart, somehow passed out to him at this contact. He held my hand, and pressed it; and it was not till he had released it, that all at once I felt a wild thrill and shock, and the pulses in my temples began to beat so fast and hard, it seemed as though all the strength in my body was drawn to them, and as though I should faint for weakness.

'There! You must forgive me for inflicting my stammering confidences upon you,' he said. 'Only, perhaps it is as well that

you should know me for what I am, — a penniless adventurer.' He gave a dry little laugh. 'I never regretted that money till just these last few weeks. Perhaps you'll think me sordid and mercenary to regret it at all. I suppose your father will be wondering what has become of us. It's got so dark.'

Mechanically I followed him back to where my father and Armidis were still seated, at the café. Then all I wanted was to be alone: a great eagerness to get away, by myself, in my own room. Yet at the same time I felt a strange reluctance to part with him, a strange joy in the sense that he was present.

All that night I did not sleep. All night I kept feeling that hand-pressure over and over again; and little things that he had said, and little inflections of his voice, kept coming back to me; and a hundred times I asked myself, 'What did he mean? Did he

mean. . . ? Could he have meant. . . ? Oh, no, that isn't possible. And yet. . . !'

I was miserable, and frightened, and bewildered, and ashamed, and happier — oh, happier than I had ever supposed a woman could be.

V.

But the next morning brought a revulsion of spirits, a reaction. All my happiness was gone. Only the shame, and the fright, and the misery were left,—a horrible chill and faintness at the heart.

'What will he think of me? What will he think of me?'

That question kept ringing through my brain, over and over again, an obsession, like some hateful tune that one has heard, and cannot chase from one's memory.

'He did not mean anything at all. Or even if he did . . . ? It makes no difference. But he didn't. It was simply his desire for

sympathy. If it had been anybody else, he would have done the same thing. But you . . . you . . . ! What you did . . . oh ! What will he think of you ? Oh, I wish I had died, I would rather have died.'

When I remembered it,—when I went over it in its details, as I was constantly forcing myself to do,—it seemed as if at the same time I was freezing and burning up, and I felt as though I should like to sink into the earth for shame. How I had not withdrawn my hand,—no, had not made the faintest effort to withdraw it,—but had allowed him to hold it just as long as he pleased,—until, of his own accord, he had dropped it !

As the day dragged away, and the hour approached nearer and nearer when I knew that I should have to meet him,—at the restaurant, at dinner,—a great sense of dread began to torment me. From the prospect of

meeting him, when I shaped it in my mind, I shrank unnerved and weak, as from the prospect of physical pain.

'I will plead a headache, and stay in my room. I will not go to dinner at all,' I said.

And for a little while this plan afforded me a great deal of relief. But then, suddenly, it struck me as of all plans the most foolish.

'No, no! If you do that, it will be like a confession. If you do that, he will know, he will know for certain; whereas now at most it can be only an inference with him, a suspicion, which he cannot be sure is true. No; you must go and meet him, and behave just as though nothing had happened. You —you must brazen it out, as Armidis would say. You must meet him with such nonchalance, you must treat him so naturally, in such an unembarrassed, matter-of-fact, amiably indifferent way, that he will not dare

to imagine anything, but will realise that he was mistaken, and that *you* didn't mean anything either, and that it made no impression upon you, and that you simply like him well enough as an ordinary acquaintance, and nothing else at all.'

But I felt very nervous, very nervous and ill at ease, as six o'clock drew near. Usually at six o'clock he would rap at my father's door; then we would go on to the Concombre Rose together. Now, at every sound in the passage outside our room, I started, and my heart began to palpitate. 'You must be self-possessed, perfectly self-possessed,' I kept thinking; and I kept rehearsing in my imagination the manner in which I should accept and return his greeting, the tone in which I must say good-evening, and the way I must let him shake hands with me, if he offered to shake hands.

Five minutes to six . . . three minutes to six . . . six o'clock . . . five minutes past six . . . an eternity to me, waiting from second to second to hear his rap at the door.

'Well,' said my father, 'I don't believe Mr. North is going to stop for us this evening. It's past six. I don't think we had better wait any longer. We might lose our table. Come.'

Then it surprised me to find, much as I dreaded meeting him, that I was decidedly disappointed, when it occurred to me, 'What if I should not see him at all to-night?'

We went to the restaurant, and took our seats at our accustomed table. Armidis was already there, lolling back in his chair, smoking a cigarette, and reading an evening paper.

'Ah, better late than never,' he cried. 'For once in my life I was punctual; and it has taught me the truth of my favourite

adage, that punctuality is the thief of time. I've lost five precious minutes waiting for you.'

We began our dinner. I could not take my eyes off the door. Every time it opened, my heart seemed to stop beating and stand still, while I looked to see if the new comer would be he ; then, when I saw that it wasn't he, my heart sank with deepened disappointment, as if sick for hope deferred.

Armidis rallied me upon my silence. 'Naughty! She just sits still and pouts. *Furibonde!* Because . . . Never mind. I won't betray you. But I know, I know. Don't look at me with that stony affectation of indifference, of ignorance. Trying to stare me down! Browbeating! Don't hope to hoodwink *me*.'

Suddenly I ceased to hear Armidis's voice. My heart had given a great bound, and now it was beating so violently, it

seemed to suffocate me; and I felt as if all the blood in my body were burning in my cheeks...

He had come in. He was making straight for us, across the space between the door and our table.

I did not dare to look up, after my first glimpse of him. I bent my eyes upon my plate; my eyelids felt thick and heavy and hot, like curtains of fiery lead. 'You must be self-possessed, self-possessed,'—the phrase repeated itself to the rhythm of my pulses. Yet I suppose there never was a less self-possessed person in the world.

'Good evening,' I heard him say.

'Good evening,' my father responded. 'We had almost given you up.'

'We were very dull,' said Armidis. 'We couldn't do anything but just sit still and pout.'

'I was detained at the studio,' he

explained, 'and then the busses were all full, and I had to walk.'

'If I don't notice him, or speak to him, what will he think?' I was saying to myself. 'I must be nonchalant and self-possessed. I must look up and speak.'

So, with the intention of giving him a formal little recognition, I looked up. But I had overestimated my courage. His eyes, troubled and questioning, were fixed upon my face. I could not bear them. I had to look down again, forcing myself to murmur a faint good-evening.

And yet I had determined to be unembarrassed, natural, matter-of-fact!

Now I was furious—whether with him or with myself I could not have told: perhaps with both. 'Oh, I am a fool, a fool,' I groaned inwardly. 'Now he *will* think . . . things.' How to cover my confusion? How to retrieve that which I had already

shown? All at once something seemed to whisper to me, 'Talk! Talk to Armidis. Ignore him, and talk to Armidis. About anything, no matter what: only as if the thing you were talking about were the only thing of interest to you in the world.'

Then I began to talk to Armidis. My tongue was as if magically loosened. Armidis met me half way. We tossed the ball backwards and forwards between us, never for an instant allowing it to rest. My father sat still and listened, enjoying it as though it were a play. Now and then Mr. North would put in a word, but I would never pay the least attention to him. All the while I was conscious that he was looking at me, with that troubled, questioning expression in his eyes. I felt as if I were under the influence of some exciting, stimulating drug,—black coffee raised to the tenth power. My cheeks burned, my head

whirled ; my voice sounded strange to me, in a key higher than its natural one ; I was talking not only with feverish volubility, but with feverish gaiety, laughing a good deal, with a laugh that seemed to me hollow and artificial : yet I knew that I was talking coherently and reasonably. And through it all, under it all, my heart was full of a dull pain, as if something were gnawing in it to get out.

When we left the restaurant I took Armidis's arm, and he and I walked on ahead, leaving my father and Mr. North to come behind. We went into the Luxembourg.

Armidis said, 'You must confess that I'm very nice, the embodiment of complaisance, eh ?'

'Of course, you're always very nice. But I don't understand just what you mean by the embodiment of complaisance.'

'Oh, yes, you do. I hope you don't imagine that I'm deceived. A mere instrument, a mere tool, a cat's-paw, in your dexterous hands. The weapon of your revenge. I see, I see. Not highly flattering! To be made use of in this way! Another man might resent it. But I'm docile, I'm long-suffering. Only, tell me, what has the poor young creature done? That's my due, I think. If I'm to serve your purposes, as you're compelling me to do, I think it's my due to be initiated into the why and wherefore. I want to know whether it's a holy war. His sins should be as red as scarlet to deserve such treatment as you're dealing out to him. Or perhaps,—you have so many divine qualities,—perhaps you make it a practice to chasten those you love.'

'You are horribly blasphemous, Mr. Armidis; and I haven't the least idea what

you mean, or even what you're talking about.'

'Fie, fie!' he cried. 'Now you've gone too far. Now I must punish you for your shocking hypocrisy and untruthfulness. Retribution! I'll be the avenging angel. I'll teach you.'

He halted and turned around.

'Banakin! Banakin!' he called out to my father. Presently my father and Mr. North had come up with us. 'I want to talk to you, Banakin, about a little matter, before I forget it. Will you walk on with me? Mr. North can take charge of Monica Paulovna.'

Then he and my father went off together, and I was left standing alone with Mr. North.

There was an interval of silence, awkward, painful.

Then, 'Shall we walk?' I heard him ask.

'I don't care,' I answered. In reality my heart was fluttering with fright and nervousness, but I noticed that my voice sounded ill-natured and sullen.

We began to walk, very slowly. For a while he did not speak.

At last he said abruptly, 'I see that you are angry with me about something, Miss Banakin. I hope you will let me ask what?'

'Angry with you? Oh, no, not in the least.'

I forced the words out with an effort. My voice shook perceptibly.

'Well, perhaps that was giving myself too much importance. Anyhow, I've managed to displease you in some way, that's very certain; to get into your bad books. I don't know, I can't think, what it can be. Whatever it is, I wish you would believe that... well, then, that... that I did it unconsciously. I wish you would tell me what it is.'

'I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Mr. North. What right would I have to be displeased with you?'

Again my voice sounded ill-natured, contemptuous, sulky; yet again I was aware of no feeling save fright and nervousness.

'Why, I might easily have done something, without knowing it, in my stupid way, — I might have said something, without meaning to, — that has annoyed you, or given you offence. I told you the first evening we ever spoke together that I had a talent for putting my foot in my plate. You see, when a man stammers, he's always saying the thing he didn't mean to. He starts out to say something, but then as he approaches the necessary words, and sees them looming up threateningly before him, he very likely gets scared away, and in order to cover his embarrassment he seizes hold of the first easy words he finds at hand, and the

result is that he says something quite different to what he started out to say, something that he hadn't in the least premeditated, and something that is sure to be malàpropos, and very possibly worse.... Well, at all events, it's certain that you haven't treated me this evening with your usual friendliness and frankness.'

'Oh, I assure you, you are entirely mistaken,' I replied.

'No, — excuse me, — I'm not mistaken, I can't be mistaken. You've hardly noticed me, hardly spoken to me or looked at me, all the evening. I dare say I deserve it; of course, I must; only, I ... I'd ... I'd like to know, for the sake of my own conscience, what I've done. Your good will and good opinion are very precious to me. I can't bear to think that I have lost them. But if I have, why, it would afford me some dismal satisfaction to be told why and how. I should

like an opportunity to explain, to make amends. But of course I can't, if I don't know what I've done.'

'Shall — shall we walk a little faster, to catch up with my father?' I said.

'There!' he exclaimed. 'You wouldn't speak to me like that, when you see how anxious and unhappy I am, unless you were angry with me, unless I had done something to disgrace myself with you.'

'Really, Mr. North, you seem to doubt my word. I have told you that I am not angry with you, and that I don't know what you mean. I should think that would be enough.'

'Well, but then will you tell me one thing more? If you're not angry with me, why do you treat me in this way?'

'I'm not treating you in any way.'

He was silent for an instant.

'I should hate to believe that I haven't

done . . . that I haven't done . . . that I haven't done anything to deserve it,' he said at last, 'that you are making me miserable in sheer . . . in sheer . . . well, then, in sheer wantonness.'

'*Mr. North . . . !*' I cried.

'Oh, there! Now you *are* angry,' he groaned. 'I forgot myself. I couldn't help it. I suppose it's useless for me to ask your forgiveness for that.'

I could not answer him. I felt that suddenly all my strength had deserted me; and I knew that if I tried to speak, or did anything but just hold myself in, I should begin to cry.

'Won't you answer me?' he pleaded, softly, earnestly. 'I was beside myself. I didn't realise what I was saying.'

'Oh, don't, don't,' I cried. . . . Then, as I felt myself trembling all over, and knew that I couldn't keep my tears back any longer,

and that I was going to make a ridiculous spectacle of myself, I was so humiliated and enraged that I said, without really understanding what I was saying, 'Oh, I hate you, you make me hate you.'

He started and stood still; and though I was half blind with tears by this time, I could see that he winced, and that his face grew pale, and that his eyes filled with pain and terror, as if I had cut him with a knife. He looked at me in a sort of blank anguish for a moment; and then he repeated, faltering, 'You hate me? Good God! What—what have I done to make you hate me?'

'Oh, no, no,' I moaned, in sudden remorse and alarm. 'Don't look at me like that. No, no, I don't mean that. I don't mean that I hate you. Only, why—why do you.... Oh, can't you let me be?'

'Oh, heavens, heavens!' he cried wildly. 'What have I done? You are crying. You

are miserable. What have I done? What have I said? I must have done something dreadful, to make you cry.'

'No, no, no,' I sobbed. 'You haven't done anything. Only, I — I am such a — oh, I don't know.'

I put out my hand, instinctively, to silence him, to entreat him to let me alone. But he must have misunderstood. He seized hold of it, and kept it in his.

'If you would only speak, if you would only tell me,' he said, and pressed my hand so hard that it hurt.

'Let go, let go,' I begged, pulling it away.

'Is it — is it because of what I said, of what I did, last night?' he asked, all at once. 'Because, if it is, I can tell you,—of course I ought not to tell you, I have no right to say it to you,—only you had better know the truth, rather than imagine things that are not true,—what I did last night I couldn't

help doing, because—oh, because for one moment I lost control of myself, and my—my love for you, Monica, my love for you, —do you understand?—my love for you got the better of me, and I couldn't keep it in. Oh, my Love! You know it now. You know I love you. Love you! Oh, but you can never know how much!'

I thought my heart would burst, it swelled so full with such a deep, unutterable, aching joy.

'Oh, Monica! Monica! Oh, my Love!' His voice was like a sigh, so low, so passionate. Then he took hold of my hand again, and drew me towards him, very gently, very slowly; and then he put his arm around my waist, and kissed me. It seemed as if all my life trembled and thrilled in the breath I drew while I felt his lips against mine.

VI.

And now there began for me a season of happiness greater than any that I had ever dreamed, a happiness as rich and as complete as it was new: the happiness that must come to every young girl, I suppose, into whose life love has just entered for the first time. Spring was deepening into summer, the wonderful golden summer of France, with its wealth of sunshine and colour and fragrance. It was as if, somehow, the magic of the summer had got into my heart, filling it with warmth and light, and making it sing.

But, of course, I could not have been happy at all, if he had not been happy too;

and I am sure that he was happy, very happy, perhaps as happy as myself: only ... Only, his happiness, though it may have been as great as mine, was not so unalloyed. For he could not do what I could do: he could not forget or banish from his mind certain cruel and relentless facts of our position: whereas to me they were, for a while at least, as insignificant as words written in water. He could not help brooding upon them, and reasoning from them to their hateful consequences: whereas I had a blind confidence that by some means or other we should be enabled to triumph over them in due time,—a confidence, unfortunately, that was simply born of my desire.

One Sunday afternoon we had gone to Suresnes for dinner, and after dinner we crossed the bridge to spend the twilight in the Bois. My father and Armidis were walking so far ahead of us that we

could talk together without fear of being overheard. Julian, however, was morose and monosyllabic ; it was easy to see that something was troubling him, that he had, as we say, something on his mind.

Then all at once he broke out with a sort of groan : ' It's all wrong, all wrong. I have no right to it. I feel like a thief.'

I did not know what he meant, and I was frightened.

' What is all wrong ? You have no right to what ?' I asked. ' I do not understand.'

' Oh, it's simple enough. No right to anything,—to all this happiness, to your love. No more right to it than a thief has to his stolen goods.'

' I don't see what you mean. No right ? Why haven't you a right ? Or how is it a question of right ? You can't help it, if I love you. One loves, just as one lives, willy-

nilly. You might as well say that you have no right to life.'

'Well, I'm not so sure that I have, if it comes to that. But anyhow, the case is different. One can't help loving, if you please; but one *can* help—How shall I say it? One can't help feeling thirsty, for instance; but one can very well help going into a café, and ordering wine, and drinking it, when one hasn't the money to pay for it. Just as surely as people give themselves up to the enjoyment of anything that they haven't a right to, just so surely must they pay for it some time in suffering. It's a law of nature. I shouldn't mind paying, so far as I'm concerned. I should consider any price cheap. But you . . . ! I can't bear to think of the pain we're storing up for you.'

'I don't understand that,' I said.

'Why, do you realise what I am? A poor

devil of a fifth-rate painter, without a penny to his name.'

'I dare say I'm very dense, but still I don't understand. Is love a luxury, which one can only enjoy if one is rich?'

'Yes, it is, emphatically. But the point is that our paradise is a fool's paradise. Here ... We love each other, don't we, Monica? That's given; that's our starting-point. Isn't it? But now look, consider. Unless two people who love each other can marry, their love must sooner or later become just an unmitigated curse. As the world is constituted, if it is absolutely out of the question for them to get married, if there is no prospect of their ever being able to marry, their love is a curse, an agony. Well, what am I? A beggar, literally a beggar, without a sou in the world, without even an honest trade whereby to earn a sou.'

'An honest trade indeed! You have your Art.'

'Art? Unless a miracle should happen, it will be years and years before I can even earn bread and cheese by my art. Perhaps never. A painter! Why, if I were a house-painter, a sign-painter, our outlook would be more hopeful. Anyhow, it reduces itself to this: we love each other, and there's no likelihood of our ever being able to marry. Therefore, in letting you know that I love you, in accepting your love, in allowing you to care anything at all for me, I'm doing you an injustice of the worst kind, a cowardly, dishonourable injustice. That's the plain English of it.'

'In the first place,' I replied, 'you are just too conceited. Allowing me to care for you indeed! Thank you. And suppose you should forbid it? That's very mannish. And, in the second place, you say: Unless

a miracle should happen. Well, and why shouldn't a miracle happen? Hasn't one miracle happened already? Wasn't it a miracle that we ever came to know each other at all? That among the millions and millions of people in the world, we two should just have found each other out? I don't believe that after God has brought us together in this way, He will let us be separated. I am sure that a miracle *will* happen, if it becomes necessary. But in the third place, suppose we can't get married for the present? Aren't we happy enough now? Can't we wait? Oh, I don't see anything to worry about. Sufficient unto the day!'

'*Entre nous le passé ne valait pas le diable, l'avenir sera délectable, en attendant jouissons du présent,*' he said, quoting a favourite maxim of my father's. 'That is all very well. You have nothing on your conscience. You're not to blame in any way. But I—

my case is dif . . . different. It's my fault. I'm the criminal. And then, look : the present is going to be so short. It's now June, isn't it? And in September, or October, at the latest, . . . do you realise what's got to happen then? I'll have to pack my traps, and go back to America. Then our fool's paradise will show up for what it is.'

'I don't see why you will have to go back to America.'

'Why, because I shall be dead-broke. That's slang, and means that I shan't have any more money.'

'But you will be no worse off with empty pockets here in Paris, than you would be over there.'

'Ah, but here I can't earn a penny, not a single penny. Over there, with the prestige of my four years as a Valentine Prizeman behind me, I can teach. I can probably earn enough to keep body and soul together, if

I'm not particular about the quality of the bond. Why, I suppose, if I have good luck, and am industrious, I can earn almost as much as a day-labourer,—say a couple of thousand francs a year.'

'Nonsense! With your talent, with your training! You'll earn a great deal more. Then you will be very economical, you will save; and when you've got a certain amount put by, you will come back.'

'Ah, that shows how little you understand the conditions. Art is paid poorly enough the world over, and held in slight enough esteem; but in our great and glorious Republic ... oh! Barring a handful of millionaires, *parvenus*, ignoramuses, who have made their money in pork or railways, and know as much about Art as they know about Esoteric Buddhism, nobody thinks of buying pictures in our country; and *ces messieurs* will buy nothing that isn't signed with a

world-renowned name. In America the artist must teach, or he must starve; and I have never heard of anyone building up a fortune as a teacher. . . . But apart from that, taking it at its best, supposing that I *can* come back some time, the separation will be pleasant, won't it? To be separated . . . who knows how long?'

'Oh, it will be dreadful, horrible. But never mind. I'll wait for you . . . all my life, if necessary.'

'Oh, what have I done to deserve such happiness?' he cried. But then his face darkened. 'That's just the point. There's just where the wrong comes in. I have no right to make you wait, to let you wait. What right have I to let you waste the very best years of your life waiting for me, when, if you'd never had the misfortune to know me,—if your unlucky star hadn't sent me across your path,—you might have cared for

somebody else, somebody who would have been less impossible ?'

'It's outrageous for you to talk like that. As though love were simply a matter of chance,' I cried. 'As though I could ever have cared for anyone but you. As though I would have given my love to the first comer!... I don't see how you can suggest such a thing.'

'Oh, I didn't mean that. I only meant... But there! What's the use of discussing it? I'm going to believe as you do. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Something will happen. I may not have to go to America after all. Suppose I should sell my Salon picture. Of course, I might as well say, Suppose the moon should fall: but let's suppose it. *En attendant jouissons du présent !*'

Armidis seemed to have divined everything. One day he said to me, 'If I were

Julian North and Monica Banakin, do you know what I would do ?'

'No. What ?' I queried.

'I would throw prudence to the dogs.'

'As usual, you speak in riddles.'

'I do that as a tribute to your intelligence, it's so penetrating. Throw prudence to the dogs. There's nothing so deadly harmful in this world as prudence. It causes more unhappiness annually than scandal, small-pox, and street-music piled together. I once knew a young man,—this was hundreds of years ago, before you had even thought of being born,—a young man who loved a young girl, and she loved him. Strange as it may seem, hard as you may find it to believe, their love was just as strong and eager, just as burning a reality in their hearts, as Julian North's and Monica Banakin's is; but they hadn't the price of an old hat between them; and they were

prudent. So, though it hurt a good deal to do it, they said good-bye to each other; and presently she married another man, and died; and he went off, and was miserable all the rest of his days; and he realised that he had ruined his life and hers, and made a pitiful failure of everything, all because he had been so prudent; and though he was never prudent again, it didn't do any good. That first prudence was irrevocable; its consequences followed him always.'

I was silent. Somehow, though he spoke in a jaunty, half-jesting tone, what he said sent a pang into my heart.

'I speak to you out of the depths of my age and experience, Monica,' he went on. 'Give prudence the go-by. 'Tis a strained quality. It falleth as the ruthless hail from storm-clouds. It curses him that gives and him that takes. Eschew it. It's for you to take the initiative. You see, poor youth,

he's Anglo-Saxon. Yes, in spite of his Créole mother, he's an Anglo-Saxon and a Yankee. Therefore he is shackled with two ridiculous inheritances: English common sense, and Puritan conscience. He, accordingly, will be for prudence and morality. Copy-book morality, shop-keepers' prudence. But you are Russian; to you belongs the glorious privilege of being bold and inconsequential; that is to say, moral in a broader and more human sense, and if not prudent, wise. You may be impulsive. It's just as comfortable, believe me, to starve *à deux*, as it is to starve singly, separately. Go and get married, since marriage is the fashion, and trust to Providence for the rest. The Lord will provide.'

'Yes,' I said, 'but you forget that there is my father.'

'No, I don't. I forget nothing. What *of* your father?'

'Why, this. What you say about starving *à deux* is true enough; but we're not two, we're three. My father is the third person, and we have no right to leave him out of our reckoning. If I were to get married, how would he be provided for? You see, I have no right to get married, unless the man I marry will be able to support my father as well as myself.'

'Oh, dear me, what dreadful rubbish!' grieved Armidis, suddenly assuming his most plaintive manner. 'As if you couldn't go on doing *your* work, earning *your* share of the provender, just as well after marriage as before it! As if, though a maid may toil, a wife must simply sit still with folded hands while her husband does double labour! Such conventionality! Such Philistinism! Evil communications corrupt good manners. I see, by constant association with your Mr. North, *you're* becoming a thing of prudence

too. There's no telling where you'll end. If—if *you* should turn Anglo-Saxon! Horror! You, whom I have hitherto regarded as my one sure refuge, my one kindred spirit, to whom I could always look for understanding, for sympathy, in my follies! Rock of Ages, cleft for me!'

'Thank you,' I cried, laughing. Then I added in all gravity, 'We are in no hurry to get married, Mr. Armidis. We are very happy as things are at present. We are content to wait and hope. We are young; we have the future. You know my father's maxim: Between ourselves the past wasn't worth a button, the future will be delightful, meanwhile let's enjoy the present. We have adopted it. For my part, there's only one thing that troubles me.'

'And that is?'

'That we have to keep it all a secret from my father. The feeling that we are de-

ceiving him, and the fear lest he may discover it.'

'Well, but what if he should discover it? What have you to fear?'

'Oh, he would never approve of it. He would forbid our meeting, or seeing each other, or having anything to do with each other.'

Armidis stood still before me, eyeing me with his quizzical searching gaze.

'And do you mean to say,' he demanded, slowly, bearing upon each word, 'do you mean to tell me that if your father forbade your meeting, you would even dream of obeying him?... Look me in the eye, and answer me that.'

'What else would there be to do?' I answered. 'We have to live together, my father and I. It would be insupportable if we had to live together in a state of discord. He has very old-fashioned ideas about the

obedience that children, and especially daughters, owe their parents, you know. Besides which, he is very firm. When he takes a stand of any kind, you could no more move him than you could move a mountain. If I should refuse to obey him in any matter of serious importance, he would never rest, he would never let me rest, until I had given in to him.'

'Enough! Enough!' cried Armidis. '*Ça, c'est le comble.* You are determined to be wretched; and you too are firm; and your determinations are not to be shaken.'

'But I am not wretched, I am very happy.'

'Well, have it so if you wish. But a few months hence? And then for all the rest of your life! Oh, dear, oh, dear! Ah, if I were you, and Paul Mikhaelovitch Banakin were my father, and I were in love with a young man, and the young man returned the compliment, and Paul Mikhaelovitch tried to

interfere,—do you know what I'd do? I'd bring him to reason quickly enough. I'd starve him out. I'd strike. I'd say, "Very good, my father; we will bow to your august desires. But I feel the need of a vacation. I'm not going to give any more music lessons, or translate any more sensation novels, or colour any more photographs, for some time to come. *You* may pitch in and earn our living for a while." . . . That's what I'd say to him; and just as soon as the boot began to pinch a little, he'd come round. Obedience, indeed! It's the member of the firm who foots the little bills who's entitled to demand obedience. There! I've said my say.'

'Yes. But I'm not up to such heroic treatment. My father is my father, and I love him. Besides, I trust in the future. I am sure it will all come right in the end. I don't want to spoil everything by any rash action now.'

'Well, I wash my hands of you. I've done my best, and failed. Now I disclaim all responsibility. Understand that; and don't come and reproach me for the sorrows you are sowing the seeds of now, when they blossom in the time to be. I don't want to croak, but blossom they will, and blossom they must. And some fine day, after your father has succeeded in separating you from the man of your choice, and in uniting you to the man of his, then you will remember the advice I've lavished upon you to-day; and oh, me! how you will repent having spurned it! That's all.'

But I should convey an altogether false idea of the situation if I allowed it to be imagined that this somewhat dismal aspect of our affair was constantly before our minds. On the contrary, for the most part we were able to forget it, and to give ourselves up

unreservedly to the happiness of the moment.

We saw each other every day. As the summer advanced, a good many of my pupils left town. Then the time that I had formerly spent teaching at their houses, I would spend at home, working at my translations. Towards five o'clock in the afternoon I would put aside my manuscripts, and Julian would come for us, and we would dedicate the remaining hours of the day and evening to the gods of pleasure. It was enough for him and me that we were together; what we did made very little difference to us. We never tired of our small daily routine; it never seemed humdrum or monotonous to us: the Luxembourg, the Concombre Rose, a café in the Boulevard St.-Michel, then the Hôtel du St.-Esprit, and good-night.... Sometimes, though, we would vary it a little, by dining on the other side of the Seine, and thence

betaking ourselves to Armidis's rooms, where we would have music and supper. Then, as I have already said, we would devote our Sundays and holidays to little excursions into the country. We would carry our breakfast with us in a basket, and picnic in the open air. This was primarily for the sake of economy, though, I suspect, we enjoyed it far better in this way, than we should have done if we had taken it at a restaurant. . . . But it did not matter what we did, or where we went: so long as we were together, within sight and hearing of each other, we were happy. Mere existence in each other's presence was a deep sweet ecstasy. Our hearts were overflowing with the joy of life, the joy of life and youth and love. The whole outer world was transfigured for us; the simplest things, the most trivial happenings, were invested with a sort of celestial glamour: so that when I shut my eyes, and

imagine myself back in that time now, a delicious warmth seems to pervade my senses, the air becomes sweet with a perfume like that of roses, I seem to hear vague soft music, and my heart trembles with an exquisite, unreasoning delight,—all this with the sunny streets of Paris, or the green banks of the Seine, or the shadowy avenues of the Bois de Meudon, for a background.

Our dissipations were always necessarily of an inexpensive kind, and therefore they were apt to be, as my father complained, plebeian, and to smack of Bohemia. On the night of the 14th July, for instance, Armidis insisted upon our accompanying him to an open-air ball that was in progress at the Place d'Italie. My father very strenuously objected, but Armidis would not hear him.

'Very good. If you're above it, Banakin, Monica and I, who aren't proud, will go

without you, and Mr. North shall come to chaperone us. By-bye!'

'It will be low, and very likely improper,' my father urged.

'Sich be our tastes,' retorted Armidis. '*Allez.* Put on your hat, and let us be off.'

My father ended by obeying him.

It was great fun, and entirely harmless. There were booths at which sweetmeats and cheap ribbons and toys were sold; and there were merry-go-rounds, with painted wooden elephants and horses, camels and tigers, all of one size, where you could take a circular ride for a penny; and there were mysterious-looking tents, into which voluble Merry-Andrews, in paint and motley, eloquently exhorted you to enter, and hear your fortune told for a consideration of fifty centimes. Of course there were Punch and Judy shows, and of course no end of little soldiers and

people were dancing on the pavement to the music of barrel-organs.

The best fun of all, however, was Armidis himself, who enjoyed it like a child, and whose pink and white face beamed with one perpetual broad smile of beatitude. He bought four tin trumpets at one of the booths —which made a trumpet apiece for each of us —and a pocketful of sweets at another; and then he went about blowing his trumpet and munching his sweets, and was in the seventh heaven. He led us all into one of the tents, and had our fortunes told; he engaged a chariot on one of the merry-go-rounds—oh, but a chariot! of gold and ivory, if you please, and drawn by four terrific griffins—and kept us driving round and round till we were giddy. Finally he bundled us into a cab, and took us to the Foyot for a supper.... And from first to last he had seized every opportunity to pair off with my father,

so that Julian and I could be alone together; for which kindness he had paid himself by shooting at us every now and then a knowing, confidential smile, and beginning to sing, softly, as if in absence of mind, 'Gather ye rose-buds while ye may!'

Oh, how happy we were, how happy! Indescribably happy; impossibly happy, it seems now. When, from thinking of those days, and forgetting the years that have passed since they were here, I come back to the present, and realise that they are gone, gone forever, gone as utterly as if they had never been . . . oh, my God, my God! how can I live and bear it?

VII.

One morning in the first week of September a commissionaire brought us a note from Armidis, which read as follows:

'My hated rival X... has sent me a box for this evening at the Opéra Comique, where they are performing his latest atrocity. I invite you three companions of the St.-Esprit to go and endure it with me. Moral support! Put on the full panoply of your *abiti neri e decorazioni*, and expect me between seven and eight. I'm afraid I shan't be able to meet you at the Concombre Rose. *Bien à vous*,—$\frac{V}{A}$.'

That was the rubric with which he always signed his notes—a V superimposed upon an A, giving the effect of an elongated X.

'Oh, yes, we will go, we will go,' said my father. 'But what a droll fellow he is, to be sure, this Armidis! He bids us put on our evening costume, which would go without saying, inasmuch as we are to occupy a box, whereas he himself—in what array will he appear, I should like to know? He who, I will wager, has not a dress-suit to his name. I tremble with apprehension. They will not admit him, if he presents himself in his customary rags, as he is entirely capable of doing; but what else does he possess to put on?'

'Yes, I wonder what he will wear,' I responded rather absently, for I had the question of my own toilette to preoccupy me.

'I only hope,' pursued my father, 'that

he will not contrive to cast ridicule or odium upon our whole party.'

'Oh, that will be all right,' said Julian, when my father had confided his trepidation to him. 'Dress-suits can be hired. He'll hire one for the occasion.'

After dinner we assembled in our room, to wait for him.

'Oh, how beautiful you are looking! What a pretty gown!' Julian had whispered to me, thereby causing me a flutter of pleasure and excitement. 'I never saw you in anything so becoming before.'

It was the best gown I had, one that I had made myself from materials purchased at the Petit St.-Thomas at a bargain; but it was nothing very dazzling, I can assure you. He had committed the extravagance of buying me a big bunch of roses.

Presently there came a sharp, imperative

rap-rap-rap at our door, which we recognised at once for Armidis's.

'*Entrez*, *entrez*,' my father and I called out in a breath.

The door opened, and Armidis advanced into the room. . . .

At sight of him, we three others first started back and gasped; then for an instant we stared at him in helpless silence, as if petrified; at last we broke into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

He was arrayed in the uniform of a captain of the French army.

We were overcome by a *fou-rire*. We laughed and laughed, till it seemed as if we could never stop. He stood still and gazed at us with a frown of injury and bewilderment, as who should say, 'What in the world has happened to you? Have you all gone mad?'

The uniform was rather worn and threadbare; the jacket was whitish along the seams;

the golden shoulder-cords were tarnished; here and there a button was missing; and the whole affair was two or three sizes too small for him, so that he looked painfully compressed and squeezed in; and you were irresistibly reminded of a corpulent sausage crowded into a skin far, far too tight, and you could not help fearing that at any moment the skin might burst. The effect of his big feet and fat red hands protruding from the short, snug sleeves and trousers, was ludicrous enough; but I can imagine nothing more absurdly funny than the incongruity between his pink, mild, infantile face, as fresh and chubby and pacific as a cherub's, softened by the vast mane and beard of snow-white hair that surrounded it, and his martial make-up. And then the air of blank incomprehension, and of hurt and resentment, with which he waited for us to recover our sobriety!

'Well, really,' he began, with a certain querulous jauntiness, by and by, 'when you are quite ready, I should be glad to learn what the joke is.'

'Since when have you received your commission?' gasped my father.

'I'm sure, if you're laughing at my uniform, you're very foolish,' the composer said, with an accent of nonchalant superiority. 'You can't be so ignorant of the usages of Society as not to know that an officer's uniform is the equivalent of a civilian's dress-suit. I don't happen to have a dress-suit, so I wear this instead. There's nothing to laugh at.'

'True enough, true enough. But where did you get it? How did you come by it?' my father pursued.

'Oh, I came by it honestly. A friend of mine, a captain, had outgrown it, had got too stout for it, if you must know the fact, and

he gave it to me. I've only had it about a fortnight, and this is the first time I've worn it in public. I think it's exceedingly becoming, though perhaps it might fit a little better. But the colour of the trousers! A perfect feast for the eye!'

'Oh, as for the fit,' laughed Julian, 'it fits you like your skin.'

'Yes, but I assure you it's too small, painfully too small. *Il faut souffrir pour être beau;* and it pinches me cruelly. But I don't dare to sigh, lest it should burst.'

'Well, I don't know, I'm not a lawyer,' said my father. 'But I'd be willing to wager a good deal that you're violating some section of the penal code by wearing it. If you should be arrested . . . ?'

'Oh, bird of ill omen! Don't, don't!' pleaded Armidis, becoming plaintive. 'How can you be so unfeeling? To suggest such a thing! Oh, you don't really think there's

any danger, do you? Not really? Say you don't. I came from the house in a *fiacre*, so that nobody saw me. I don't want to be arrested. What shall I do?'

'Oh, now that you've gone so far, you may as well go to the end,' my father answered. 'Brazen it out. Put on your grand air, and carry it off. Of course you must take your chances. At the worst, it's not a capital offence: only a few years' retirement from the world.'

'Oh, I see! You're only teasing. Cruel! At first I thought you might be in earnest, and I was frightened... Well, shall we start?... Mercy upon me! How fine we are, with our silks and flowers and furbelows! Quite killing!' he concluded, addressing me.

We set out to walk to the Place St.-Michel, where we were to take the omnibus... Almost the first persons we encountered, as

we turned into the Boulevard, were three little soldiers, who, directly they beheld Armidis, brought their hands to their caps, in salute.

'Oh, misery, misery!' he began to grieve, as soon as they had passed. 'What am I to do? If all the soldiers we chance to meet are going to salute me! Surely I'll betray myself, my imposture will be unmasked, and perhaps they'll send me to gaol. How absurd of them, how indelicate! To touch their caps to a man who doesn't know them, who doesn't want to know them. It's very pushing and presumptuous of them, isn't it?'

'Oh, extremely so,' said Julian, sympathetically.

'But what shall I do?' he pursued, with eagerness. 'It's a complication that I never dreamed of, and I haven't the remotest notion what to do. You, Monica, you who

are practical and ready-witted and far-seeing and everything, tell me.'

'Why not return their salute?' I suggested.

'Oh, to be sure! Return their salute! Why, of course! Oh, thank you so very much. Strange that I shouldn't have thought of it myself, but I *am* so stupid and inefficient. Yes, yes, I'll return their salute.'

We passed a good many more soldiers before the evening was over, whose cap-touching Armidis graciously acknowledged not only by touching his, but by adding to that gesture a most affable smile and nod.

After the performance he begged us to go home with him for supper; but my father, who seemed to be in a bad humour about something, rather impatiently declined.

On our way to the Hôtel du St.-Esprit my father scarcely spoke. This caused me

a vague anxiety and disquiet, and I kept wondering what could have gone wrong with him. When we had said good-night to Julian, and were alone together in our room, I asked him.

'I see that something is troubling you,' I began. 'Will you tell me what it is?'

'What it is?' he repeated, looking at me with cold, ominous eyes. 'You ask me that? Well, it is that my faith in human nature has this evening received a blow from which it will not soon recover. Do you understand? Or must I be more specific?... Ah, you blush, you turn pale. I do not wonder. This evening, at one and the same instant, I learn that my daughter has been deceiving me, and that a young man whom I have mistaken for a gentleman, and regarded as a friend, and trusted accordingly, has been abusing my confidence in the most shameful and cowardly manner. Is that enough?

To be exact, in the box at the theatre, I chanced to overhear something that Mr. North had the impertinence to whisper in your ear; and I observed that, so far from resenting it, you even welcomed it with a smile. I was as much outraged as I was astonished.'

He paused; but, though every word that he had spoken had stung me like a lash, I could not answer. A thousand different ideas, fears, hopes, impulses, resolutions, went whirling through my brain in wild confusion. In a little while he continued....

'Owing to the exigencies of our position, I have been compelled to accord to you a degree of personal freedom to which young unmarried women of your class are not accustomed. I relied upon your own appreciation of the circumstances, upon your honour, your self-respect, as well as upon

your common sense, not to take advantage of my enforced indulgence. But what do I find? I find that, forgetting what was due to yourself, your father, your sex, your position, you have, like any common girl of the people, formed a disreputable, an impossible connection with a young man. A young man? A young beggar! An individual who has neither rank, nor fortune, nor prospects; a Bohemian, a vagabond, an adventurer. And this, not only without the sanction of your father, but without his knowledge, secretly, covertly, *à la dérobée*. His conduct in thus clandestinely paying you his addresses, I do not need to stigmatise; it speaks for itself. Of yours in accepting them, I will only say that it has destroyed the security and the happiness of my domestic life. My daughter has deceived me once in one thing: how can I avoid the inference that she has deceived me often in many

things? Heaven knows how far you may have gone!'

At this I found my tongue.

'We have gone no farther than to confess our love to each other. We could not help loving each other. I have not meant to deceive you. I have simply held my tongue. There was nothing to tell, except that we loved each other. It would only have troubled you, and brought misery to us. I do not see why the happiness or the security of your life should be affected.'

'Never mind, never mind. I do not care to discuss it with you, or to listen to your evasions and excuses. You may hold your opinion, I may hold mine. It is not a matter for discussion, it is a matter for action. Mr. North is in no position to marry. Even if he were, I might still have my objections to make to an alliance between the daughter of one of the most illustrious

houses in the noblesse of Russia, and a nameless American. But he is not, and that is final. It is therefore incumbent upon me, as your father, to forbid you to have anything further to do with him. You must from this time forth treat him as a stranger. I demand from you a promise of obedience. If you refuse to promise, I shall take measures accordingly. That is all.'

'Of course I refuse to promise,' I cried. 'You have no right to treat me like this—to try to deprive me of the only real happiness that has ever come into my life. Do you wish me to be nothing but a slave, a machine? Am I entitled to none of the ordinary experiences of life? Why should you begrudge me my one little joy? Isn't my life gloomy enough, narrow enough, hard enough already? Don't I do my duty by you to the best of my powers? Oh, it is too unjust, too cruel!'

I was beside myself with pain and anger; therefore I spoke not very coherently, and I said things that I ought never to have said to my father.

'I will have your obedience in this matter, whatever it may cost me,' he retorted hotly. 'You are of full age; so I cannot shut you up in a convent, as I might do if you were still a minor. But there are moral measures of restraint that I can take, which will be effectual enough. This is a case where the ends will justify the means. She would betroth herself to a pauper, *pardieu!* No, no; *ça ne se fait pas dans notre famille....* The only real happiness that has ever come into your life, do you say? It is intolerable, your saying such a thing to me, your father, a man who has lived for nothing but your happiness ever since you were born. It is your true, your ultimate happiness which I am trying to assure to you now, but which

you, in the blindness of this impossible infatuation, would destroy.... Now you may leave me. I have nothing more to say to you. Go to bed.'

But when, next morning, after a most miserable, sleepless night, I came downstairs to his room, I was surprised to be greeted by him with as much kindness and affection as if we had parted on the best of terms.

'Good morning, my dear,' he said. 'Come and kiss me. There! You have been crying. Your eyes are all red and swollen. You have lain awake all night? So have I. I have been thinking it over, thinking it over; and I have concluded that I was hasty in the attitude I took last evening. You see, the discovery had been so sudden; I hadn't had leisure in which to get over the shock it caused me. And I was hurt at the

thought that you had concealed it from me. It wounded me to think that you had not been more frank and open with me.... However, no more of that. Let bygones be bygones. I've had plenty of time to consider it during the night, and I have determined to make the best of it. I am willing to concede as much as with any sort of propriety I can, provided that you and he, on your side, will agree to behave like reasonable and mature human beings, and not like children. But first of all I want you to examine yourself, and tell me whether you are entirely sure of your own mind. At your age one is very apt to mistake a passing caprice or fancy for a genuine passion. For instance, suppose that there were no impediments of any kind to a marriage between you, are you quite sure that you would be willing to become his wife?'

What I answered to all this I do not need

to repeat. My father had suddenly lifted me out of the deepest quagmire of the Slough of Despond into the seventh circle of delight. I was not chary of my expressions of gratitude and affection; I felt as though I could never make due amends for my injurious speeches of the night before. He kept protesting, with an air of embarrassment, 'There, there! That will do. Let bygones be bygones. Say no more about it.' At last he rang the bell, and when the garçon had responded to it, 'Will you rap at the door of Mr. North,' my father asked, 'and if he be in, convey to him my compliments, and the request that he will favour me with a visit before he leaves the house?'

A minute or two later Julian entered the room.

My father made him his most ceremonious bow, and begged him to be seated.

Then, 'Since I saw you last evening, Mr.

North,' he said, 'my daughter has confided to me the fact that you and she have formed an attachment for each other. You are a very young man, and I am getting to be very old. I hope, therefore, you will not take it amiss if I say to you, without rancour, as a father might speak to a son —*en bon papa*, in fine—that I should have been better pleased if you had followed the usages of the world a little more closely, and opened your mind to me, before opening your heart to her. I will not deny that I have felt a little hurt at your lack of frankness.'

'The reason for my not speaking to you, Mr. Banakin,' Julian rejoined, 'was simply that I had nothing to say. There was no use telling you that I loved your daughter, unless I could ask you to consent to our marrying, or, at least, becoming engaged. But that I couldn't do, because, as you know,

I'm disgustingly poor. I had never meant to tell *her* that I loved her, either; I realised perfectly well that I had no manner of right to do so. I ought to have gone away, —cleared out, and taken my secret with me. But I hadn't the—well, then—the—the grit. One evening we were talking together, and it came out before I knew it. I admit that it was all wrong.'

'Oh, I don't know; I don't know that I should judge it quite so harshly as that,' my father said. 'It was unfortunate, certainly, that in the actual state of our circumstances, yours and mine, she and you should have come to care for each other; but I do not know that you can be blamed especially for making a clean breast of it, when once the mischief was done. Human nature must be allowed for; and we all know that secrets of that sort are hard to keep. However, we

will not dwell on that aspect of the affair. Let bygones be bygones. What we ought to consider now, in a spirit of mutual friendliness, are the practical difficulties, the material obstacles, that it presents. You and Monica love each other, but you are in no position to get married. What, then, is to be done?'

'It is very good of you to take it in this way. What is to be done? Of course there's only one thing for me to do,—pack up and leave. Go home to America. That's not very pleasant, but it can't be helped. It's been the only thing for me to do, the inevitable thing, from the beginning. My four years are up; my money is all spent; I have barely enough left now to pay my passage to New York. It's pretty hard to admit, but it's desperately certain—I must leave Paris, and go to America. When I get there I'll . . . I'll seek my fortune. I'll set to work,

and try to haul myself out of my hole. I'll try to make a position and an income for myself. If I succeed, I'll come back here, and if she still cares for me, ask you for Monica's hand with a clear conscience. If I fail ... well, God have mercy on me.'

My father rose, and held out his hand to Julian.

'You speak like a man of sense, courage, and honesty,' he said. 'Of your own accord you have suggested precisely the course that I was going to propose to you... I trust that you, my daughter, perceive with us that this is the only wise and promising step that can be taken.'

'Oh, I suppose it's *wise*,' I assented. And it seemed as if I could hardly pronounce the words, for the great aching lump that filled my throat. 'Yes, I suppose it's wise, but

that does not make it any less terrible, any easier to bear.'

'Hard to bear you will unquestionably find it, both of you,' my father went on. 'But life is made up for the most part of things that are hard to bear. We may none of us hope to escape them; the most we can do is to make the best of them, accepting them, resignedly, reverently, as a part of the mysterious discipline that an inscrutable Providence has imposed upon us. But hard as it seems, it is the only means possible to your eventual happiness. The longer Mr. North lingers here in Paris, the longer must his ultimate success be delayed. The sooner he leaves and begins his career, the sooner will he be able to come back.... Yes, I will permit you to write to each other, with certain stipulations. You must not write oftener than once a month, and the letters

must all be of a tone simply friendly, such as I may read. Until you are actually betrothed, which will not be, of course, until your circumstances are more flourishing than at present, I cannot sanction a correspondence of a more intimate character. . . . Now that is all settled. There is nothing further to determine, except the date of your departure.'

'Oh, if the wrench has got to come, there's no use putting it off, I suppose,' said Julian, in a dull, dry voice. 'It will hurt just as much at one time as at another. I'll . . . I'll sail . . . next Saturday.'

I shall never forget the face he turned upon me as he spoke those words: it is before me now as vividly as it was then: so pale, so pale, with lips drawn in the ghost of a smile, and eyes that burned with anguish, and hopelessness, and a sort of dumb appeal. For me, the coldness of death entered into

my heart. It was as if a skeleton-hand griped it, so that each pulsation sent a wave of pain throughout my body.

He left me on Friday, taking the train for Rotterdam, whence he was to sail.

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